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ABSTRACT

This anthology on communication as it concerns parents, children, and teachers contains 16 essays. The majority of the pieces are opinion papers by professionals from either colleges or elementary schools who are involved in child development. The contents of this document are as follows: "Communication Is the Key"; "Parent-Teachers: Communication"; "The Orientation of Children to School"; "Parents: You Take the Initiative"; "Building Bridges"; "The Impact of Silent Communication"; "Homework: Vehicle of Communication"; "Understanding Differences in Parents"; "Understanding Differences in Children"; "Working with Parents"; "The Teacher Profits Too"; "Parent-Readiness for Kindergarten"; "Communication in Guidance"; "The Whole School Wins or Loses"; "Okay-Plus, or Whatever Happened to the Report Card?" and "The Key to Successful School-Community Communication." (JA)

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Communication Is the Key

By HENRY J. OTTO
Professor, Educational Administration
University of Texas, Austin

Communication is the key to building understanding, trust and mutual helpfulness between teachers and pupils, teacher and parents, teachers and principals, parents and pupils, and supervisors and their contacts with all who have an intimate relationship to a given school. Unless we can communicate with mutual understanding we remain strangers or nodding acquaintances at best. But to say that communication is the key doesn't tell much. We must know, understand, and practice the ins and outs of *effective* communication. Let us review a few of the basic elements.

Usually we hear correctly the words the other person says but frequently we misinterpret what the other person meant to tell us. The reason for such misunderstanding is that we interpret everything we hear or see in terms of our own background of experiences, beliefs and attitudes. This is called our *personal behavior center*. Suppose the principal tells Teacher A that Parent X is on his way to see the teacher and the principal also says that Parent X is a politician; then Teacher A is likely to color his interpretation of what Parent X says by the teacher's beliefs about, and attitudes toward, politicians. Furthermore, the listener can seldom know the hidden emotions of the speaker. The best way to avoid such misunderstanding is to be a good listener and to interject enough probing questions so that the speaker's intentions as well as his words can be interpreted accurately by the listener. This means getting well enough acquainted so that full attention can be given to the *content* of the conversation. The word *transaction* is used to describe such a situation. (1)

Effective Communication Is Urgent

The time is here when schools can no longer avoid or delay effective communication with all to whom the school relates. Public interest in education is probably higher today than it has ever been. People want excellent schools. The desire for excellence is accompanied by critical attitudes; people question whether the "what" and the "how" are really the best. Except for a few snipers who still sing the "Why Johnny Can't Read" tune, the critical attitudes of most persons are not negative; they merely consist of the questions that accompany the desire for good, up-to-date programs.

National policy and the forward progress of our society demand educational programs far beyond the imagination of most of us. Hence school support must increase if the needed scope and excellence are to

be achieved. Unless added support is forthcoming, school staffs will be caught in a squeeze—the demands upon them will far exceed that which can be done. The only way to avoid the dilemma is to assist millions of citizens to get a vision of the possibilities, the needs, and the steps to be taken.(2) Those who now staff the schools must assume the responsibility for this communication task, for they and their successors will reap the disaster if the vision for the future fails.

Research Can Help Us

Most of the avenues of effective communication have been known for a long time. An excellent publication, *It Starts in the Classroom*, appeared in 1951.(3) Another is the *Thirty-Sixth Yearbook* of the N.E.A. Department of Elementary School Principals, *Parents and the School*.(4) To help improve internal communication, every teacher should read *Helping Teachers Understand Principals*.(5) There are many other valuable publications which, despite their not-so-recent dates of publication, are worth careful study today.

The older, helpful publications must be supplemented with current ideas and research findings. All recent books and articles dealing with the education of disadvantaged pupils, pre-school or in-school, stress the importance of parent involvement in the child's school program. West stated it explicitly, "In short, the point argued here is simply that a significant ingredient which should be built into efforts to improve the education of the minority and disadvantaged groups is that of increased home involvement."(6) The difficult problem is securing parent involvement and parental attitude change. New devices must be explored. The conventional PTA meeting and other mass-invited group sessions will not serve the purpose. Clarizio found no difference in attitude of Head Start mothers who had attended a series of lectures, those who had attended a series of PTA meetings, and those who had not attended either series.(7) He emphasized the more informal and participatory activities. Riley and Epps found that the usual newspaper and radio publicity does not reach parents in disadvantaged areas.(8) All who deal with pupils from disadvantaged homes have found that personal contacts are needed to convince parents of the importance of their participation.

But home-school communication should not be restricted to pupils and patrons in disadvantaged areas. From some points of view, home-school communication is even more important in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. In the past, at least, public policy and school support have been determined by voters in these areas. Furthermore, parents in the more affluent areas have a deep interest in the character and quality of school programs. Their interest may have different roots than the interest of parents in low income areas because family goals are different.

Elder's study, which, although completed years ago may still be indicative of patron concerns today, was done in a school in which the median IQ was between 118 and 120 and the majority of patrons were professionals, including a generous percentage of university faculty members.(9) A total of 528 parents (243 fathers and 285 mothers) evaluated each of ten parent-school relations activities in which the parents had participated during the school year. Nine of the ten activities were rated as being of some or great value by 91 to 99 percent of the parents. Only PTA meetings received a lower favorable reaction and even these were appraised as being valuable by 87 percent of the parents. The ten activities evaluated by parents in this study did not include some parent participatory roles judged by some as being even

more important, such as serving as a resource person or serving as a room mother, teacher aide, library helper. There are many useful ways in different school situations whereby parents can become informed about the school program, assist in improving it, and thus develop a deep appreciation of the school's role in children's development.

The Students Are Important

Perhaps it is trite to restate that the school exists for the benefit of the students, yet much is happening today that suggests that students have been forgotten. Student discontent in colleges, universities, and some high schools is symptomatic of curriculum irrelevance and preoccupation with "the establishment" rather than with the student.(10) In the public school domain much time and energy are going into teacher rights, cooperative agreements with school boards, national committees endeavoring to revamp the content to be taught, team teaching which by its very philosophy should involve much larger group presentations (I hesitate to call it large group *instruction*), computer-assisted instruction, and other hard and soft hardware for individualizing instruction. Some day most or all of these innovations will have had sufficient experimental evaluation so that the best features of each can be retained as improvements in the program. But at present, professional energies are going into matters pertaining to many *components* of the school program; not much attention is being given to *the student in the program.*

Ernest Melby highlighted the importance of the student when he said, "What we need is an educational program in which the child as a person is more important than his day-to-day cognitive learning--a school, a home, and a community which in close coordination help the child to respect himself more each passing day."(11) Apparently enough people are recognizing the danger of forgetting the student in the educative process and the possibility of increasing dehumanization of the school so that the Department of Elementary School Principals chose as its theme for its April 1969 annual meeting, *Humanizing the Elementary School.* It is gratifying to note that a major national organization is turning its attention to matters that are more important than any of the current innovations receiving so much publicity.

Let's Not Be Too Late

Every profession has the responsibility for educating the public regarding the best that the profession has to offer so that society as a whole may benefit from the research and advances in practice which the profession generates. Too many people in the education profession have neither recognized nor accepted the responsibility. Professional groups have seldom "stood up to be counted" when major issues in education were being debated at the state or local school board level.

There is some evidence that the very existence of public schools is being challenged today. The move toward expansion of non-public schools has many roots, but prominent among them is the criticism that public schools are not doing a good job and that there is too big a lag between present practice and the best that is known. Public schools should proceed with all reasonable speed to eliminate the institutional resistance to change and to assist the public in becoming acquainted with the good things the schools are doing. The years ahead will bring unprecedented demands upon the schools which cannot be met with existing facilities, staff and support. The public must know and understand if the needed support is to be forthcoming.

Communication is the key. The remainder of this bulletin is filled with suggestions for improving communication among all who are con-

cerned with the excellence of tomorrow's schools. Classroom teachers will have to assume a major share of the responsibility for effective communication.(12)

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Parents — Teachers: Communication

By RUTH S. GUE
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Because new information has grown to be so vast and the innovations in practically all aspects of modern life are coming so rapidly, education and the educative process must become increasingly sensitive to the needs and potentialities of change. Revolutionary knowledge of how the human brain and nervous system develop, function and perceive, requires new and creative approaches to human relationships and communication processes. Modern space exploration to the moon, planets, and eventually, to far reaches beyond the solar system makes imperative the need for clear and meaningful communication.

These two illustrations of modern man's endeavors might be thought of as mere beginnings for future exploits, emphasizing with dramatic impact the need for education to constantly assess and come to grips with the complex relationships, needs, potentialities and processes required for human existence in this rapidly changing physical and social environment. Given the incessant change and knowledge explosion from which there is no turning back, we are forced to ask ourselves what is and what is not essential for society as regards relevant experiences, content and processes.

Communication—Critical in Tomorrow's World

No one will deny that the accurate interpretation of each human contact imperative in all avenues of today's living will become increasingly necessary in the decision-making required of the individual in tomorrow's world.

One of our greatest challenges, if we are to mature physically, intellectually and psychologically—blessed or saddled, as the case may be, with the ability for instantaneous communication—is to develop greater facility in the exchange of ideas and feelings. Success in this endeavor is crucial to human survival.

How can we cope? What shall we do? How can we give assurance that communication will be meaningful and integral to life and learning? What are the requirements?

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If in fact as someone has said, "It starts in the classroom," then teachers have an exciting role to play in "setting the stage" and "paving the way" for improvement in communication. We have no choice but to change if we are to go forward as individuals and as a nation.

With all the advances in modern educational technology and the tremendous innovations required to achieve moon orbit, it is imperative that educators examine current methodology and determine just what needs to be changed. Is it not time that we change some ideas about learning and adjust the curriculum to place the learner in his rightful position? If the individual is no longer seen as a product of his environment but rather as an active participant and formulator of his world, then many heretofore revered and accepted practices must be reevaluated, possibly discarded and replaced regardless of cost in money or pride.

Marshall McLuhan has alerted us to the tremendous importance of communication. His conception of a dynamic, fluid educational environment forces us to focus attention upon the body of academic knowledge we have held sacred and have tried to impart to students in the guise of an education. He has opened our eyes to the need to assess educators as communicators in a field reacting to, as well as reacting upon, their students. If we heed his words we must certainly look again at the whole educational process which, while going less than half way, in many cases is static and sterile.

Interaction Through Communication

Modern communication's theory with its analysis of the individual as a receiver as well as a transmitter gives us a clearer look at just what we have been doing and failing to do in education. Studies of adjustment of behavioral attitudes induced by formal versus informal communication channels show dramatic differences in favor of the latter. The teacher must become cognizant of communication theory and utilize the methods that research tells us work best. Students must no longer be seen as groups of identically endowed receptors. Now the individual reacting in and upon his learning environment must be appreciated as a transmitter as well. Programs must include many opportunities for interaction between students, the learning materials and the teacher. New skills in listening requiring sensitivity to the speaker are demanded. As the student makes his way through school he emerges as a sum total of his ability to communicate. He sees himself as a person of worth or not, depending upon his success with language. If he is encouraged to grow, given support and inspiration by his teacher in the world of words through discovery and experimentation, he will also grow in pride and self-confidence. Conversely, if teachers continue to use language as a weapon to be wielded against the young, expecting perfection and facility before it is achieved, we may continue to have the hostility and alienation so prevalent among youth today.

The concept of wrong and right no longer holds in today's educational setting. The Aristotelian method is out of place in a sophisticated, complex world of flux. Methods that encourage many opportunities for trial and error and allow students to become sensitive to the many shades of rightness and wrongness relative to the situation prepare them to survive in the ever-present message bombardment. Teachers must prepare tomorrow's citizens to sort out the real from the unreal, the true from the untrue. If they are to react sensibly to the multitude of stimuli constantly emanating from the mass media, teachers must help students become sorters of information, helping them to be as aware of the supplications of the political propagandist as of the Madison Avenue hucksters.

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Experiences can be included at all school levels to help children deal with the onslaught of communication. If the environment is supportive, if the world of language is perceived as a world of fun and excitement from the child's earliest school experiences, teachers have begun to pave the way!

Since more and more parents seek to participate actively in all phases of education, it is up to the school to provide means for dialogue between school and parents, efficient channels of communication between home and school that will facilitate the total educational process.

Diverse Opportunities To Communicate

School personnel, especially teachers, may have to expand or create new channels of communication with the home. It will take imagination and creative energy to devise better exchange between parents and classroom.

Although traditional school-based meetings are still effective, where parents are unable to attend evening meetings, alternatives such as home visits or telephone conferences should be held. If an atmosphere of hospitality and informality prevails, parents will come to school more readily. The staff should activate programs that enlist the valuable resources and services many persons in the community can offer. An honest offer for involvemer ו "their own" school assures more cooperation and respect for school property than a "hands-off," institutional policy that still prevails in many schools.

The concept of the parent's role in the school—that of the infrequent visitor to special yearly performances or as a field trip or party chaperone—needs to be changed. The home visit is often the most successful means of enlisting parental interest and support.

Teachers at a particular school used the in-service days for welcoming visits with every incoming kindergartener. The pride and delight expressed by the children was only a minor dividend. On opening day there was a visible lack of the usual tears and trauma. Other grade level teachers have begun to follow suit, agreeing upon the added effectiveness in their roles.

The initial home visit, if the teacher is warm, relaxed and supportive, will put members of the family at ease. It is important that the visit be brief and planned and announced well in advance, with the child in question present and the center of concern.

If the home visit is held instead of an evaluation conference, it will of necessity be of a different nature. The need for clearly defined goals is indicated, with a statement of plans, a summary and several concrete items to illustrate the comments. The child need not be present.

Casual contacts with parents outside the school can make good ties, but it is wise to keep such meetings brief and friendly. Seizing upon the opportunity of a random meeting for a serious conference can lead to disaster. The teacher ought to keep in mind as she maintains an interested, respectful attitude that the parent is seeing her in a somewhat different setting.

Some schools have already begun to explore other programs. At one elementary school, parents serve as volunteers in a resource center that supplies original and custom-made instructional materials needed by teachers.*

At another elementary school thirty-four parent volunteers work as aides on a regularly scheduled basis, serving in a variety of roles as

* See also, *Aides to Teachers and Children*, Association for Childhood Education International, 1968.

clearly defined in a specially written manual. Their responsibilities range from Book Maker Aides to Greenhouse Aide; from Creative Writing Journal Aide to Keeper of the Keys. They type, collect money, order supplies, run dittos—in general, they free teachers of time-consuming clerical tasks. The growth in community understanding of the school's programs as a result of the volunteer aides is matched only by the delight of teachers.

Enhancing, Enriching Understanding

In some schools where there is cognizance of the need for effective communications, positions have been created to handle the task. Community coordinators have an important function in acting as liaison. In one instance a coordinator got volunteers to participate in an operation involving after-school tutoring. When the success of this program was noted, more volunteers were invited to work at the school under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher. Cultural enrichment was added when parent volunteers began to assist with special field trips, reading readiness activities and language arts programs.

Some large school systems have employed, in addition to the community coordinator, a communications specialist who screens and channels incoming and outgoing information to the press and other media. Because of great interest in school news items it is important that sources of information be accurate.

In communities where parents have had strong feelings of alienation from governmental institutions, it is important to open the school for adult education and community services. The building, kept open long after the school children leave, can be used for a multitude of community programs.

Principals and teachers must serve as leaders in many school-community concerns and undertakings. Adult education courses and recreational programs after school hours function advantageously for all concerned. Many schools now hold seminars during the school day for interested parents. One such program, which meets on a regular basis to discuss problems of current concern such as drug addiction, adolescent behavior or child study, is highly successful. Principals and informed school officials chair the groups.

Educators have begun to devise other new approaches to facilitate communication with parents, through such means as concerted efforts to devise creative, meaningful PTA programs, and to try to maintain supportive, cooperative parental or community relationships. In conferences a cheerful tone is found to be most effective with parents. Reports to parents need to be clearly worded, positive and pertinent, reflecting the school's regard for parents as interested participants in the school life.

Examples of children's own work are an excellent means of communication with the home, because they are not only an indication of the child's success but convey to parents the character of the total program. Where necessary, explanations or instructions should accompany the material. Some teachers use a newsletter format as a meaningful vehicle for sending the child's work home.

Homework, treated elsewhere in this publication as a significant vehicle of communication, can enhance or diminish home-school ties. Interesting, challenging home undertakings may enlist the whole family in an activity that can lead to new hobbies or interests. Conversely, frustrating, impossible tasks can alienate the entire household. It is necessary to consider the context in which the homework will be done. The resources of one family might serve to assist a child while another

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family may find the undertaking an unfair imposition.

An excellent school program will result in equally effective communication and home-school interaction, where individualized instruction and relevance of curriculum determine the character of school-home communication. Schools which have moved toward an open, flexible curriculum show the best promise. Taking its place in the community as an instrument for civic participation, the school gains as well. A school program that utilizes the nonprofessional but interested community members enhances the total learning process of its pupil while it gains enthusiastic supporters.

The Orientation of Children to School

By LUCILLE W. FREDERICK
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The orientation of children to school actually begins long before the first formal contact with teachers and other official personnel. In many instances the process may well be labeled the "non-orientation" of children to school. Ways of thinking about and viewing the entire educational process are known to be largely inherited by the child from his parents. Thus any discussion of first school experiences must of necessity include the parents and their community as well as the child.

It is now estimated that 70 percent of the nation's population is living together on one percent of the national land area. This means that the attention of educators is shifting increasingly to urban and suburban schools enrolling population segments of widely diverse background, not only within a single county or school district, but within an individual school building. Schools that have had relatively stable numbers of children of similar background over many years are finding themselves faced with expanding or shrinking numbers of homogenous groups. A changing student population may have characteristics requiring different curricula and the consideration of new approaches involving parents, children and teachers. More than ever before, the involvement of parents with the educational process is necessary if we are to help each child reach maximum development. In fact, the active contact with and involvement of the school with many parents is necessary to assure the initial enrollment as well as the regular attendance of their children in school.

Faced with the awareness that these problems are part of irreversible nationwide trends, educators are discovering that enrollment procedures for formal education, however carried out, bear an increasingly important relationship to the total school program. Such procedures would seem to suggest a long-term process instead of the usual short-lived program involving little more than the spring pre-school conference, a brief parent meeting preceding school opening in the fall, and the child's actual entrance into the classroom.

Head Start — a Catalyst

Unquestionably, the single most important factor behind the expansion of the public school role in pre-school education today is Project

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Head Start. For the truth is, the establishment of kindergarten programs in public school across the country had proceeded only slowly until the recent Administration's official promotion of pre-school programs for deprived children. The monies suddenly available to impoverished areas and the attendant publicity have been instrumental in renewing interest in public school kindergarten.

Some states have established a statewide kindergarten program for the first time through legislative enactment. Many local jurisdictions are considering the inclusion of a pre-kindergarten program. And for many others, a study of Head Start programs under way has resulted in a re-examination of their own established kindergarten programs with emphasis on procedures in orientation. Much of the organization for Head Start, with its approach to parent-readiness as well as child-readiness, reaches far beyond the traditional bounds of the role of the schools as viewed by many educators and the general public. However, the successful implementation of these programs is due to more than the increased outlay of time and money. It requires the addition of at least three more ingredients, new to many public school systems: first, a true acceptance of the parents as working partners in their children's education; second, the development of new working relationships between social agencies and schools; and third, the use of far more imagination than tradition allows. Together, these public institutions have accepted the "whole child" philosophy and are inviting the community to share in the educational processes provided for their children. What has been developed is a natural, sequential, common-sense design for school orientation readily adaptable to the individual school.

Earlier Information for Parents

The pre-school conference, usually held in the spring prior to the fall opening of the school year, has generally served as the first contact of the school with parents and pre-schoolers. Many schools now, however, prepare for the experience by sending printed materials to parents of prospective enrollees as much as a year in advance of registration. This material contains information on expectancies for the child from the developmental point of view and gives suggestions to the parents about the things they can do to help their children to develop readiness for school. These may include: (1) a list of easy-to-reach places to visit such as stores, parks, libraries, farms, museums, and firehouse; (2) suggestions for sharing simple, everyday experiences with pre-schoolers that will increase their awareness of the world around them; (3) some simple techniques that will encourage the child to listen and to extend his vocabulary; (4) some ways to encourage self-reliance and a measure of independence in "doing things himself." A supplemental booklet may also be sent to the child to be read to him by the parent. It should be "addressed" to him, telling by words and pictures some of the things he will do in kindergarten. Two or three months before the pre-school conference, the parent is sent medical and dental forms to be completed and is given a date to visit the school for registration.

Registration: Time and Facilities

When the conference day arrives, the parent has the limited responsibility of bringing the child to school at the specified time and of presenting the required background information. The school, on the other hand, has the opportunity to go beyond the mechanics of registration to lay a foundation for a mutually satisfying triangle of parent-child

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school cooperation. To do this successfully requires more of administrators and teachers than mere recognition of the more obvious values inherent in this unique experience in the lives of parents and children. It is to understand that the focal point of interest for both parent and child is the teacher and the classroom, not only on this day but throughout the child's years in school. Everything possible should be done to facilitate the registration process, to make it friendly, informal and comfortable. This will be the result if careful consideration is given to the many factors brought to each individual school situation, including: (1) the profile of the community's physical, economic, and social make-up; (2) the numbers of children to be enrolled; (3) the time to be allotted for each part of the conference; (4) the physical set-up of the registration; (5) the enrollment personnel needed and their functions; (6) the number of teachers and facilities available and the importance of the teacher role in continuing orientation; and (7) the role of the kindergarten teacher.

The number of days set aside for registration may be determined by the number of children to be enrolled. Assignments for a specified time and date alphabetically arranged and spaced carefully will shorten waiting periods. Parents and children should be greeted as they arrive. Handbooks and other take-home printed information may be given to mothers at this time, which may be skimmed during any brief waiting period that may occur.

The room used for registration should contain a low, child-sized table and chairs for pre-schoolers' use, invitingly supplied with colorful books, drawing paper, crayons and small, manipulative toys. The child will be encouraged to play quietly if the table is placed where the mother can watch him and be seen by her child as she talks with registration personnel. Each child may be given a name tag to wear. As he works at the table, the school psychologist, speech therapist and nurse may be able to talk with him and observe his behavior informally. These contacts generally prove more rewarding than direct confrontation at a desk with mother standing by to prompt him. If the people who help with registration are chosen for friendliness as well as efficiency, they will be more likely to put the parents at ease and to help them answer questions more fully.

After talking with both parent and child, the speech therapist will be able to determine need for therapy, perhaps beginning in the summer months before the child's entry into school. The nurse will check returned health information carefully, discuss it with the parent and note any special concerns either she or the parent may have. A list of community social agencies and services, as well as medical and dental facilities available, should be given the parent, as many families may be new to the community or unable to afford private care. The school psychologist with a pleasant manner and skillful questioning can encourage the parent to list concerns about the child and reveal much about the child's maturity level. A parent can be helped to pinpoint areas of development that may require remedial attention before the child enters school or that might be helpful for the teacher to be aware of in working with the child.

If the principal gives high priority to registration days, making himself available to meet informally as many parents and children as possible, working together with the registration personnel, he can convey a welcome that will give parents the feeling that they can definitely contribute to the school and to the education of their children.

When registration is completed, the parent and child are taken to

The Orientation of Children to School
LUCILLE W. FREDERICK

the kindergarten room and introduced to the teacher. If there is more than one room and teacher, they should be invited to visit the other rooms also and to meet all the teachers before they leave. This will forestall an all-too-common situation in September: a child may be disturbed to find his impression of a certain room and certain teacher has been altered by his being placed elsewhere. During the visit the newcomers should be made to feel free to move about the room. As in the registration room, simple materials should be available to the child for drawing pictures or working puzzles. Several presently enrolled kindergarteners may be asked to help the teacher with housekeeping tasks and to help the preschoolers feel at home, an arrangement which permits the teacher to chat privately with the parent while observing the child among several children.

The necessary spacing and time allotment for registration will give the teacher time to write down information the parent may give her about the child and to note some of her own impressions that should not be trusted to memory. When the visit is concluded, the parent may be given printed material relating to the kindergarten program in that school, which might include the date of the parents' meeting just prior to the first day in the fall.

At the close of registration the school ought to have more than the usual meager amount of background information about each child and his special needs, information that can help the teacher plan in advance programs based on these needs and follow-ups on any remedial suggestions and concerns.

First Day of School

A short meeting for parents may be held on the first day of school to provide any new information on buses, class scheduling, and routines. It is suggested that the kindergarteners remain at home on this day of general excitement and confusion, allowing time for the setting up of patrols and routines to be followed during the first days of school.

The first days of kindergarten attendance may be planned in any number of ways and will necessarily vary from school to school according to the needs of the children. Drawing upon the registration information, the kindergarten teachers will be able to select a program best suited to class size, home environment, chronological age and maturity levels.

Among the many ways of beginning school found helpful in assuring a comfortable, child-centered orientation program are the following:

(1) All the children are present every day, for one hour and a half, for the first week of school.

(2) If the classes are large, one-half the children may come to school on alternating days for the full session or for one hour and a half, depending on the numbers of children enrolled.

(3) Children may be divided so that half a class may come for the first hour of a class session and the second half for the last hour.

The best plan for any school situation is one that provides for the smallest number of children together during the first days of school. If this is impossible to arrange, the abbreviated period for all children present would be most suitable.

The orientation program should by no means be concluded by the registration of the child or his actual entrance into kindergarten. In most schools it is continued formally through the media of the report card, the bulletin, the newsletter, PTA, conferences, and meetings based upon felt needs and interests of the community. Parent surveys

may reveal talents in many areas new parents can share with the school.

But to the kindergarten teacher, as the year progresses, falls the major share of the responsibility of working with and through the parent as well as the child. Most of these contacts and methods will be informal. Many contacts may be little more than a word in the hall or at the classroom door, a hastily scribbled note, or the printing of Johnny's story about the picture he has painted. The teacher may visit the home and encourage the parent to visit the classroom at any time or view a special exhibit. Many parents benefit as much as their children by a field trip to the zoo or nearby museum. Most importantly, the teacher should do a great deal of listening during conferences, to encourage observations of the child by the parent. The teacher may assist in arranging meetings with specialists and help to interpret findings to the parent.

Some of the most successful kindergarten programs include meetings in the kindergarten room at night so that working mothers and fathers may attend. Professionals in early childhood, such as pediatricians, child psychologists, or reading specialists, may be invited to talk with parents over coffee, while the teacher acts as moderator. Or the teacher may hold the meetings herself to explain the program and afterwards to work with parents in small groups. These meetings may be used to introduce parent-child study groups to the community.

It is obvious that the kindergarten teacher needs to be as skilled in communicating with parents as she is with children. In short, her role is that of public-relations agent as well as teacher to the very young, by virtue of her unique position at the beginning of the child's formal education.

The long-view orientation of children to school is built upon a recognition of the importance of first impressions in developing desirable attitudes and performance throughout the school years. Early preparation promotes a partnership between the school and parents and supports the central role of the kindergarten teacher in a flexible program designed to fit each situation.

Parents: You Take the Initiative

By GLENN E. HOLMES
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and
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School-community relations are generally perceived as the theories, techniques and procedures used by *schools* to initiate communications with the public. In much the same way, school-parent and teacher-parent relations are often dependent upon initiatory acts by schools or by teachers in bringing parents in contact with schools. While these school-initiated activities are both desirable and necessary, too little thought has been given to parent-school or parent-teacher relations where *parents* are the initiators.

There are several reasons for suggesting that parents need to take the initiative. First, one fact not to be overlooked particularly with reference to education, is that children belong to parents. The average parent desiring the very best in education for his child wants the child to "be prepared" when he finishes school. Although there is no agreement as to what is meant by being prepared, the average parents in their concern hold high aspirations for their child's education.

There are some parents, however, who not only do not hold high expectations for their children but, because they don't care, they actually neglect their children. Under these circumstances school attendance laws mandate that they keep their children in school until a certain age. Minimum educational requirements dictate what parents must do, a provision they cannot sidestep. Children, under custody of parents, make it essential that parents take the initiative in communicating with teachers, with other parents and, through the school, with all children involved. Someone has said, "Youth passes this way but once." What is accomplished in his behalf or what adults fail to accomplish as he "passes by" is irreparable. Teachers have thirty or more students to teach and guide. Try as they may, they cannot give every student all the personal attention desirable. Parents, by taking the initiative, can help the teacher in better understanding each student. In the interest of the welfare of his child, the parent, by initiating breakthroughs, can reduce any possible "insulation" that schools may have developed.

Second, parents have a financial investment in the schools. One might say that parents collectively own the school. They contribute to the support of schools through paying taxes. Besides public schools, parents still contribute a large share of the support for private and paro-

chial schools. What happens in education is reflected in school costs, which directly affect local family financial budgets. Parents should take the initiative in trying to understand why school costs are necessary, how the costs of education are distributed and what is the picture with respect to projected school costs. While it may appear that tax money for school support represents money "paid out," parents must realize that there is an investment feature built into this financial effort. Money spent for education is an investment in America's future and for the perpetuation of democracy.

Because of the two basic principles—parental responsibility for the education of children and the parents' financial stake in the schools—it is incumbent upon parents to take the initiative in securing a favorable educational climate for their children. In this way parents play a vital role in bringing the community to the schools.

Parents in Group Activity

Through already existing school-community groups such as PTA's, PTO's and Citizens Advisory Committees, parents can become involved with their schools. Many of these groups have failed to achieve their maximum potential simply because too many parents have neglected to give them needed support. Such groups can be no better than parents want and expect them to be.

In discussing PTA, the writers would emphasize that it can and should mean more than the six to nine meetings that most PTA units schedule each year. Some parents have come away from a PTA meeting understandably disappointed and have concluded that PTA is not a viable force in building bridges between parents and schools or that PTA can do little to improve the education and welfare of boys and girls. This need not be the case. PTA should mean not only a series of meetings, but discussion groups, special committees, short-term and long-term projects, provision for room mothers and many other avenues along which interested parents can find meaningful ways to become involved with schools and make a contribution to the betterment of their children's education. A PTA unit not providing various means through which parents can become involved may be strongly stimulated to new life and action through the efforts of one or two individuals and of a few other informed parents who will earnestly want to explore other ways of providing cooperative action among members and potential members.

Parents often note that schools have strayed too far from the on-going laboratory of life of the community; that schools have failed to utilize the abundance of physical and human resources available in every community. A partial explanation for this divergence of interests is that educators, tending to be a mobile group, are simply uninformed about their neighborhoods and communities. PTA's and other interested school-community groups can help overcome this problem by offering to help schools prepare an up-to-date community resource file, which, if adequately done, can be used by school personnel in seeking background information about the neighborhood and community, possible places to be visited on field trips, and names of persons who have had and are willing to impart certain unique experiences with school groups. What small neighborhood served by an elementary school does not have at least a few persons who have lived or traveled to a foreign country, or who have had some singular occupational or adventurous experience? Elementary school geography classes could profit greatly by having access to outside "experts," slides, costumes, and other materials so often available within a few blocks of the school.

An even more ambitious project for a parent group would involve conducting a fairly comprehensive study of one or more schools. Persons carrying out such a study can make use of resources such as, *Looking in on Your School,*[1] a PTA-developed guide which raises a number of pertinent questions and makes reference to generally accepted educational standards and criteria. A study of this type would imply looking at a number of areas including curriculum, school facilities, instructional resources, guidance services, and school finance. Such studies are particularly needed by elementary schools, since schools at this level are not eligible for membership in regional accrediting groups, with the result that few elementary schools are periodically afforded opportunities for a comprehensive study and evaluation. In most states, the required "evaluation visits" by representatives from the state educational agency are but perfunctory tours that fail to get at the heart of the school program.

The fact that a group of parents may not have the necessary expertise to carry out all phases of the study need not be a deterrent, for as teachers and administrators will have to be involved in certain phases of the study, they would be in a position to supply professional insight. A professional consultant knowledgeable in elementary education can be secured from outside to coordinate the study and provide needed detached professional judgment. With volunteer workers (parents) doing the bulk of the data gathering and leg-work, the cost of the outside consultant should not be too much for a board of education. Although this might seem to some parents to be needless and even frivolous expenditure, it ought to be apparent to forward-looking parents that here is a relatively inexpensive procedure for studying and evaluating systemically and, hopefully, improving elementary schools. This can be a helpful first step in documenting school needs for subsequent community action.

Such studies or the existence of certain school issues or problems that may demand community-wide consideration and action direct attention to the important role that can be played by Citizens Advisory Committees. Many of these committees have been instrumental in studying school needs, directing the community's attention to these needs, and developing community support for school proposals. Many Citizens Advisory Committees have rendered major service to schools by recommending and supporting needed action on some rather volatile issues including millage elections, bond issues, site selection and school district reorganization.

The short-term, issue-centered nature of many Citizens Advisory Committees usually enables them to enlist the services of community leaders who may not choose to become actively involved with more permanent groups. Similarly, here is a type of group where fathers, too often inactive in school affairs, find an avenue for participation.

Paraprofessionals

A trend in education that seems certain to increase school-involvement opportunities for parents and other residents of the community is the greater use of paraprofessionals, including teacher-aides, library aides and clerical aides. Some of the positions are part-time volunteer jobs, others are part-time or full-time paid positions. Some that start as unpaid, part-time volunteer posts soon grow into full-time or part-time paid positions. Educators realize that not all tasks carried out in a school have to be done by certificated personnel and that some duties

[1] National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *Looking in on Your School,* Chicago, Revised Edition, 1966.

may in fact be more appropriately accomplished by nonprofessionals. In commenting on Berkeley's school desegregation efforts, Halpern notes:

> Almost a thousand "para-professionals" are also engaged directly in bringing the outside community to the Community Classroom. One hundred teacher aids (mostly black) assist in "cluster teaching," in community liaison, in helping the black child form the self-image that encompasses confident learning.[2]

One notes that the involvement of teacher aides in Berkeley appears to have provided a means for bringing more minority group members into close contact with schools. Minority group involvement is a goal which persons sincerely concerned about better parent-school communications need to keep in mind. At present, most parent groups are essentially white, middle-class groups. Economically disadvantaged parents, both white and non-white, must feel that their views are important and that they have something to contribute. Their needs and attitudes regarding their children's education cannot be "brushed under the rug." Success in dealing with the problems of the economically disadvantaged is dependent upon involving them in planning in order to understand their attitudes and to have them committed to helping themselves and others in bringing about desirable goals in education.

Parents have a right—in fact a responsibility—to be informed about what is happening in the schools and to be alert to constructive means they may employ in being of service to their schools and their children.

[2] Ray Halpern, "The Berkeley Plan: Tactics for Integration," *Saturday Review*, December 21, 1968, p. 48.

Building Bridges

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Teachers of young children have long been concerned with providing building materials for children—wood, hammers and nails, blocks of all kinds and sizes, and beautiful junk. But Hymes (2) speaks of *teachers* building—teachers building bridges. The bridges Hymes describes are those built to bridge the gap that has developed between home and school. He speaks of a bygone era when home and school were one and the family taught the child all he needed to know. Now that society has assigned major educational responsibilities to the schools, teachers and parents need to meet on bridges of understanding and communication for the good of children.

Many materials can be used in building bridges between home and school. Parent meetings have been traditional building materials. Teachers have long planned programs to meet the needs of children, but even when low attendance tells us group meetings are not meeting the needs of parents, many have continued to see parent group meetings as the only building material.

At Iowa State University we have explored some other ways to build good home-school relations. In the Department of Child Development the laboratory presently includes four groups of nursery school children and one kindergarten group, which means that we are working with as many as ninety different children and 180 parents during the school year, with the summer sessions of nursery school adding as many as 36 additional children and their families.

For each group there is a head teacher with a master's degree and an assistant teacher who is a graduate student in child development. All undergraduate majors in child development do a part of their student teaching in these laboratory groups. The head teachers and the assistant teachers work with approximately 50 student teachers each year. During student teaching, all child development majors take a course,

Building Bridges
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Home-School Relations, in which they are expected to work with head teachers and assistant teachers in their respective groups to plan for parents and children. Since teachers, assistant teachers, and student teachers all work together to plan programs to meet the need of the parents in their particular groups, each group has a somewhat different program. Each year programs vary as teachers try different materials for building the bridges between home and school.

In group conferences, a variation of the usual conference where the teacher talks with one parent or set of parents, a small group of parents is asked to observe for a period during the nursery school or kindergarten session, after which the head teacher talks with them over coffee. Some parents prefer talking to the teacher privately about their child; others seem more comfortable in a group situation, while many attend both kinds of conferences.

Bridges enable travelers to cross in both directions; home and school learn from each other. A variation from the usual home visit is the teacher's inviting children and parents to her home. One impression such visits serve to correct is children's frequent impression that teachers live at school.

Several parents and children ventured to my all-day open house during Christmas vacation, braving the worst blizzard of the year, to learn about life in a small apartment. A mother later reported her child's amazement that her teacher had no table in the kitchen, no upstairs and not even a dog!

Another teacher invited goblins out for a trick-or-treat evening to come to her home on Halloween. Children and parents had the opportunity to meet that teacher's "daddy," as her husband was called.

A group of student teachers planned a party for parents and teachers, adapting a college classroom for the reception by converting it into a living room complete with a fire in the fireplace. By moving chairs and tables and hiding them in an office and a hallway and then raiding other offices for comfortable chairs and benches, a pleasant setting for parent-teacher conversations was created. Attendance at the party exceeded optimistic expectations. Student teachers reported they really enjoyed getting acquainted with parents and felt more comfortable in subsequent parent contacts.

Some groups have planned family picnics at local parks as a way for families to meet one another in the fall or to say good-bye in the spring.

Inviting fathers to the nursery school playroom for a "Daddy's Night" has also been successful in the college laboratory nursery school. Viola Carmichael has described a similar program (1). We have had several evenings when children came to school with their fathers. Some teachers may worry about the child who is "left out" because his father is not living at home or for some reason cannot come. When one father had to be out of town the week of "Daddy's Night," a neighbor was father for his own son and for the boy whose father was gone, an arrangement that certainly did not reduce the participation of either boy or the father who was present! On the day after one of these special evenings, one little girl asked if she could bring her daddy back to play again that night.

Although many parents are staff members at Iowa State University and might be described as a "reading group," the parent library has not been particularly popular. Since space and financial resources for this facility are limited and since other excellent library facilities exist in the community, bibliographies on topics of interest to parents might be a better approach. Some teachers plan to develop bibliographies or book lists that parents could use at the city library and at the university library. Our parents do read independently and exhibited

their interest in academic reading by attending a class for parents during a whole spring quarter at Iowa State.

Observation and Seminars

Parents are understandably interested in what observers who fill our observation booths are doing. A small but faithful group of mothers attended weekly class sessions planned to increase their understanding of child development and to gain a better picture of what the college students are observing in the beginning child development course. Parents purchased the same text that students use and were also assigned to observe the nursery school program. These mothers were also interested in research in the Department of Child Development so when graduate theses topics were appropriate, mothers volunteered to read these and report to the group.

During the enrollment period for the class, some parents expressed an interest in attending but indicated that a commitment to attend class over a whole quarter was too long for them. To provide for shorter term commitment, this past year parents were invited to attend a parent seminar one night a week for three weeks, with Guidance and Discipline as the topic. So many parents signed up the meeting place had to be changed for larger accommodations. Reading materials were distributed and the following week a smaller group of parents met to discuss their ideas and feelings about guidance and discipline and to express their reactions to the various reading materials. At the third and final session parents met with the head teacher of their child's nursery school or kindergarten group for some exploration of how guidance and discipline are interpreted by different individuals. Fathers as well as mothers participated in these seminars. When parents were asked to make a brief written evaluation of the seminar program, one father objected to writing and said, "I can just *tell* you. What we all need are some more sessions like these!"

Parents have contributed a great deal to parent participation in the nursery school. Both fathers and mothers have brought musical instruments to play for the children. One father brought the family's pet, a huge great Dane, the object of much admiration and interest as the children observed the father's handling of the huge dog. This was a unique and valuable contribution for this father. The dog was accustomed to children and was a patient companion to the children who wanted to romp with him. Others were more cautious but developed enough confidence by the end of the visit to pat the dog. Still others were content to watch from a distance; they too were learning about dogs and about themselves and their feelings. One day a mother brought baby ducks for a day of swimming in the water table and for gentle holding in many laps.

Parents are asked to indicate on the enrollment forms what hobbies, talents and interests they are willing to share at nursery school. Many do not recognize the contribution they can make but some teachers have been particularly successful in helping parents see what they can add to the program's enrichment. In one group an Indian family all came to school. Classmates had the opportunity to meet a child's mother in her lovely sari, to share some Indian candy made by the mother and to meet the baby in the family.

One graduate teacher originated "toddler days" when younger siblings are brought to school to visit for brief periods.

Still another method of parent-teacher contact is the note sent home from school. Although we have no newsletter issued regularly, teachers have used letters to the group of parents to make routine announcements and to introduce new student teachers to parents or to share

specific aspects of the program. A simple mimeographed form has made individual notes sent home with children instantly recognizable to parents and enables teachers to quickly communicate news of events to parents she may not see that day.

Here is a sample for 4¼" x 5½" memo-pad paper:

Date .....

A note from

..... 's teacher:

Signed:

Yes, we do sometimes have the traditional parent meetings but these are planned as desired and not to meet a yearly schedule of meetings. Usually there is a meeting for parents of children who are entering the nursery school. One recent special meeting well received by the parents was a panel, moderated by an American-born father, of a father and two mothers from different cultures describing child rearing in their native countries.

Thus, at the University Child Development Laboratory School we have been exploring and with success different materials to use in building strong home-school relations and in meeting the needs of parents and children as individuals.

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The Impact of Silent Communication

By NEITH HEADLEY
Mary E. Leeper Fellow
ACEI Center

Mark Twain once said, "The difference between the just right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." I should like to propose that the difference between the just right unspoken word and the almost right unspoken word is equally divergent. But instead of measuring the divergence in terms of light, I propose that it be measured in decibels. Now it may sound paradoxical to measure silence in terms of volume of sound and yet, in viewing the fact that "actions speak *louder* than words," I am willing to do just that. What would you say is the decibel range of your silent communication? And how sensitive are you to its impact on others?

All too often we seem to be unaware of, or insensitive to, the impact that our own silent communication—our designed environment, our attitudes and our actions—may have upon the behavior and feelings of others. Probably each one of us could profit sensitivity-wise by giving thought to the way in which the pantomimist with but a single prop—or no prop at all—can take an entire audience from laughter to tears without ever speaking a single word.

That which we *do* not only can speak louder than words but in many instances it can be a more effective and more sincere expression of our feelings. A spoken thank-you, for example *can be* nothing more than verbalized words. A silently communicated thank-you can, on the other hand, be a most heartfelt expression of gratefulness. I am reminded at this point of a father who was in the process of pressuring his four-year-old son into saying his thank-you. Said the father, "Kurt, did you say thank-you to the engineer for letting you climb up into his cab?" As quick as a flash Kurt replied, "No—but he knew by the way I looked that I felt that way inside." Needless to say, the wise father, a bit overwhelmed by his son's sensitivity, did not pressure the verbalized thank-you any further.

Young children have a great deal to teach us about the impact of silent communication. They are amazingly sensitive to a frown or a smile. Their awareness of human moods is almost uncanny. A two-year-old sitting in his highchair looked into the faces of the adults gathered round the table, then turned to his mother and said, "Mommy, who going to cry?" A telegram had just come from Viet Nam reporting that the child's father had been killed in action.

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The More-Than-Cognitive in Learning

It is gratifying to note that in the fields of psychology and education even those who have but recently so strongly aligned themselves with the purely cognitive approach to learning are now giving credence to the fact that there is much more than the cognitive to be considered in the learning process. Attitudes and feelings are once again being recognized as playing important roles in learning. And the role that silent communication plays in developing attitudes and feelings is being reconsidered.

Whether we realize it or not, silent communication is a powerful force in both "the education of the head and the education of the heart."

Some Specifics for Teachers

How sensitive are you to the following?

(1) The effect of room environment upon behavior:
- A room can be so structured that it inhibits wholesome living.
- A room can be so unstructured that it seems to say little more than "Come on in and mess around."
- A room can be so functionally set up that it affords a constant challenge to profitable and wholesome living.

(2) The effect upon the group of various room entrance techniques:
- A child's or an adult's entrance may be disturbing to the group.
- An entrance may be made so that it is supportive to the ongoing program.
- An entrance may be made so that it is completely ignored by the group.

(3) The effect of a greeting upon a child's self-image:
- A warm smile or just a glance of recognition can make a child feel good about himself.
- A glare or perhaps no greeting at all can make one feel small and insignificant.

(4) The effect upon a group of an adult's physical bearing:
- A crisp manner inspires action and cooperation.
- Evidence of fatigue or ill-health often evokes apathy and sometimes uncooperativeness.*
- A relaxed posture in rest time encourages quiet relaxation in others.
- A yawn will often start a whole round of yawns.

(5) The effect of silent signals:
- A light switched off can indicate the beginning of a rest period.
- Draperies pulled back or shades raised can indicate the approaching conclusion of a rest period.
- A motionless stance can indicate that attention is awaited.
- The placement of a chair can indicate where a group may be expected to sit.
- Arms extended in a "V" shape can indicate the area within which the group may be expected to sit.
- An upraised arm can signal children from the play yard.

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* An exception to this may be found in the case of the adult who has lost his voice.

A hand, palm down and lowered by degrees, can indicate the need for a lowered voice.
A hand, palm down and slowly lowered, can suggest taking a sitting or lying position.
A hand, palm up and slowly raised, can suggest sitting up or standing up.
A raised finger and a tilted head can suggest listening for a specific sound.
A tilted head accompanied by a slightly strained facial expression can indicate "Please speak louder."
A finger in front of one's lips can indicate "Quiet, please."
And on and on and on the listing of silent signals might go!

(6) The effect upon the group of various observation techniques:
Attention directed to desirable behavior will support the ongoing program.
Attention directed toward general activity rather than toward a particular child will encourage further activity.

(7) The effect of various listening techniques:
Appreciative listening will make the speaker confident of his presentation.
Inattentive listening will make the speaker feel embarrassed and eager to conclude what he is saying; or arouse him to fight for attention.

(8) The effect of using the judicious pause:
A judicious pause can indicate an open-ended answer, i.e., appreciation without approval or disapproval.
It can indicate an expectancy on the part of the speaker.
It can indicate a time for enjoyment of the present or immediate past.
It can indicate a time for anticipating that which will follow immediately.

(9) The effect of a handshake or handgrasp:
A handgrasp or handshake convey a feeling of warmth and sympathy. They can also
- convey wholehearted approval
- be no more than a mechanical movement
- be a limp and vapid gesture
- even indicate a feeling of repulsion.

(10) The effect of a facial expression:
A facial expression can indicate admiration and approval.
It can express both sincerity and insincerity and children are quick to note the difference.*
A facial expression can indicate disapproval.
It can indicate disgust, indifference, avarice, anger and even hatred.
A facial expression can depress or uplift the spirits of others.

Attraction or Repulsion

Off and on, as I have been writing these last two paragraphs, I have been playing with two block magnets here on my desk. And as I have observed their reactions to each other, I have been reminded that in

* Said one child to his teacher, "Why do you smile all the time? Everything ain't so funny." And said another child, "Mother don't do that! Smile real, not toy."

The Impact of Silent Communication
NEITH HEADLEY

many ways silent communication is comparable to the attraction and repulsion of my two magnets.

My two magnets

- can be drawn together so closely that effort has to be exerted to separate them
- can, when wanted, perform as a single unit
- can be in such positions that they actually repel each other
- can be so distant from each other that there is no reaction whatsoever between the two.

Magnetically—as an adult—what is your silent communication rating?

Now, having come to the end of this printed-word-communication—I would ask that those of you who are teachers do two things:

(a) make a second decibel-check on your own silent communication and

(b) rate, if you will, your reception of the silent messages sent to you by Johnny and Johnny's parents.

Actions truly can speak *louder* than words. But remember, if the "volume of sound" is not properly adjusted you can be completely unaware of the messages which they convey. Check your decibels!

Homework — Vehicle of Communication

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Children need schools that will help them become the kind of men and women able to live life to its fullest, able to give and receive love, joy, sympathy and understanding and able to cope with trouble, sorrow and all the problems and tasks of life. What kind of schools are necessary to fulfill this need is an age-old problem with no simple solution. Long lists can be made of necessary items that go into the making of such a school. The present writer would propose one basic ingredient and then devote the remainder of the article to the development of an idea for establishing that ingredient in the mind of the reader and hence into practice in the classrooms and homes of children everywhere.

More and more people are beginning to realize the importance of communicating with one another. It is perhaps a truism to say that a meeting of the minds with clear understanding can do much to help solve problems that confront us and, hopefully, make a better world in which to live. But it is a vital truth that a lack of clear communication causes many problems that bring about destruction and sorrow.

Whether one is aware of it or not, the school is constantly involved in the act of communicating with the home and community. Sometimes this communication is clear and there is understanding and good feelings, but often it is foggy and results in misunderstanding and bad feelings. Children, caught in the middle of this process, either benefit or suffer as the case may be.

The problem, then, seems to be one of how to go about improving communication. How do we communicate with parents in such a way as to bring about benefit to children instead of detriment? There are numerous ways. One of the most effective ways is through homework assignments. Opinions concerning homework differ greatly, and there is no conclusive evidence as to the value of routine assignments,[1] but homework seems to be with us to stay and it appears that great benefit could come from taking advantage of this existing device to improve the lines of communication with the home.

[1] Ruth Strang, *Guided Study and Homework, What Research Says to the Teacher*, No. 8. (Washington, D. C.: Association of Classroom Teachers, National Education Association, 1968), p. 28.

Homework: Vehicle of Communication
CLOTILDA WINTER

The Kind of Homework Makes a Difference

Has it occurred to you that the only way some parents know anything about school is from their child's homework assignments? Has it occurred to you that the most beautifully stated philosophy and list of objectives ever to be published in a curriculum guide can be repudiated by the kind of homework assignments teachers make? Many parents attend parent-teacher meetings that are devoted to lengthy explanations about the school's beliefs concerning individual differences. Then day after day the children in Miss X's room are all given the same amount and kind of arithmetic problems to work at home. What are the parents to believe? Or perhaps the program has to do with reducing pressures on children, and the very next day Johnny and Susie go home with two or three hours of homework they don't understand how to do or see any reason for doing. Again, which of these acts communicates more clearly to parents—what is said at the meeting, or what is actually done the next day?

Have you ever heard mothers talk about their children's school when they didn't know who you were or that you were connected with the schools in any way? Perhaps you were having your hair shampooed at the beauty shop, or you were traveling on a plane, bus, train and "just happened" to tune in on the conversation near you. You may have discovered that what they like or don't like about school stems from their ideas of what happens in their child's classroom, and this knowledge is based largely on the kind of homework assigned.

Let's take a brief look into homes of three children in a third grade where the teacher has assigned forty arithmetic problems to be worked and returned to school the next day. There are thirty children in the room, and all of them have the same assignment.

John Carter is very good in arithmetic. He already understands the principle and concepts involved in these particular problems and gains nothing from working them. He does them very quickly, but grumbles about having to do so. He doesn't come up with a very neat paper because he is in a hurry to get finished so he can work on his model airplanes. He probably even misses a few problems. He is reprimanded at school next day for making errors and for a "messy" paper.

Susie Smith is a slow-learning child who has not yet "caught on" to the concept involved in working these assigned problems. Since she does not understand how to work them, after thirty minutes of sitting and staring at her paper, she is completely frustrated. Not only is she frustrated, but so are her mother and father because they do not know how to help her. They haven't had the "new math," and Susie insists that their way isn't the way the teacher wants the problems worked. Soon Susie is in tears, and her parents' nerves are raw; an unhappy family goes to bed with Susie's homework not done. A note goes to school with Susie the next day, which adds to the list of unhappy persons when the teacher reads it.

Now let's look in on Janie Brown. Janie understands the concept but needs practice to help her gain mastery. Whether she needs forty problems is questionable, but Janie is a little girl who likes to study, is neat, careful with her work, and sticks with it until she gets the job done. Naturally, she is commended the next day for being so neat and such a good worker.

What has this particular assignment told these three families about their school? John and his parents see the school as a place where routine tasks must be carried out, even though they see no value to John in doing them, and where nothing very exciting ever happens. Susie's family dislikes the school and looks upon it as a place where

no one is really interested in whether children learn or not. Janie and her parents like the school. They think of it as a fine place with good teachers and where Janie is getting the kind of help she needs. Miss Jones definitely sent a message to these three sets of parents, a message received in three different ways; three ways that mostly clouded the channels of communication and acted as a detriment to two out of three children.

John, Susie and Janie are fictitious, of course, but there are many real children in classrooms throughout the world in similar situations. Fortunately, there are brighter pictures, and many teachers are taking advantage of homework assignments to tell parents what they know and believe about the kind of school that seems to be the best for their children.

One teacher did this quite effectively through what he called an "Egg Drop." The dean of a school of education arrived at school one morning excited about a science homework assignment his young son had been given. The entire family had spent an interesting weekend watching, and probably making various suggestions, as Mark attacked the problem of how to drop an egg off the roof of a one-story building without breaking it. According to the father, this was one of the most challenging assignments his son had ever received. Also, according to to the father, that school is a good place for Mark to be, because he has a highly creative teacher who has the ability to challenge children's thinking.

Know the Background: Strengths and Weaknesses

What must a teacher know to facilitate clear understanding between school and home through homework assignments? First, he should know the home conditions of each child to such an extent that he knows what kind of place the child has to work, what materials, such as encyclopedias and other reference books are available, and any other physical conditions that might tend either to hinder or aid the youngster with home study. Second, he should know enough about the child's home duties and other activities such as scouting, music lessons, dancing lessons, church activities, club meetings, hobbies, and cultural and family recreational activities to fit assignments into a schedule that will not cause undue conflict. Third, he needs to know the child well enough to be able to plan the kind of homework that particular youngster needs, and can benefit from, the most. A pupil's strengths and weaknesses in his physical, mental and emotional health have a strong effect upon his attitudes and interests, which in turn, are bound to affect his academic performance. Consideration of a child's particular needs would, to a great extent, call for individualized assignments.

Making Homework Humane

If teachers know individual strengths and weaknesses, what is the next step? Some specific suggestions may be of value:

1. Plan assignments that fit each child's home conditions. If he does not have a quiet place to study, perhaps a conference with the parents may lead to their providing one. If such a place cannot be provided, maybe he would be much better off not having any homework assigned that calls for quiet study. If he does not have reference materials, avoid home assignments that call for their use.

2. Plan assignments that can be fitted easily into a time schedule, taking into consideration other activities the child and his

family are involved in. Keep routine, drill-type assignments quite brief and to the point. Some authorities[2] feel that the maximum time be not more than thirty minutes for sixth-graders and less time for lower grades. Of course, time should vary with type and purpose of the assignment and should be kept flexible.

3. Plan assignments needed for each child and within each child's ability. For mastery, Mary may need practice on basic facts of addition. But if Johnny knows them and needs to spend a little extra time on spelling, his practice should be on spelling. Don't waste his valuable time requiring that he practice something he already knows.

4. Be sure the children understand the purposes of the assignments and how to carry them out. Directions must be definite. Preferably, they should be started in class so the teacher can be sure pupils know what to do and how.

5. Assign creative and challenging problems as often as possible, problems that call for open minds, use of imagination, and that allow children to make discoveries. You may not think of an "Egg Drop," but will think of ideas just as exciting in the form of science projects and experiments, social studies projects, creative language experiences, and enrichment activities in mathematics. Parents would be happy, surely, with an assignment that on a weekend trip kept children busily occupied with highway maps, figuring mileage and distance, determining directions, and observing land and water formations along the way. Such an assignment, concrete experience in learning map skills, would benefit not only the child whose "homework" it was but perhaps his older and younger brother and sister as well. Assignments involving listening to political speeches and TV commercials afford excellent opportunities to detect propaganda techniques. It is important that the children have been prepared ahead of time at school for what to listen for, how to record the information, and what to do with it in the form of making inferences and drawing conclusions. The possibilities for learning are limitless. As the teacher thinks more creatively about homework, further suggestions will evolve.

6. Children who are highly motivated and challenged by assignments will "assign" themselves homework projects. Rewarding them with acceptance, appreciation, time needed at school for sharing and praise for a job well done will encourage self-initiated assignments. When this happens, they are truly learning how to learn and getting enjoyment and feelings of accomplishment from their learning.

7. Avoid giving homework assignments for disciplinary reasons. To quote from an earlier ACEI bulletin, "Any teacher who assigns homework as a disciplinary measure, exacting quantities of drill and meaningless busy work perpetuates an outrage on the teaching profession. This is not teaching but exploitation."[3]

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[2] William D. Hedges, "Guidelines for Developing a Homework Policy," *The National Elementary Principal*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2 (November 1964), p. 47.

[3] Rebecca S. Payne, "The School's Part in Home Study for Intermediate Grades," *Homework*, (Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1963), p. 15.

8. Check all assignments carefully. If the child needs more help, further assignments should be made accordingly. Don't be like the teacher an older brother was referring to when he gave the following advice to his young sister, "You don't have to worry about getting your homework right. She just throws the papers in the wastebasket without looking at them anyway."

9. If a child has been absent and needs extra practice to help him catch up, be sure both child and parents understand what is to be done and how. Remember that this should not be a burden. Keep it brief and purposeful.

10. Make library materials easily accessible to children for checking out for home study. Some schools are now checking out not only books, but slides, filmstrips, projectors, tape recorders, tapes and recordings.

Many more ideas and suggestions might be made. If teachers take advantage of the opportunities there are of utilizing homework as a vehicle of communicating to parents what teachers know and believe about children and how they learn, perhaps this learning will be improved and, consequently, the schools. It is a grim fact, but all some parents ever know about school stems from the kind of homework their children are assigned!

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Understanding Differences in Parents

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Parents are different too. Does this say anything to us as teachers? We are accustomed to making the concept of individual differences in the children central to much of our planning and thinking, but do we also apply it to our contacts with the parents of the children?

We try to be patient with a child who cannot learn as quickly as some others and offer extra help to the youngster whose background is inadequate. We may recognize that a child has an emotional problem and try to work with him in as supporting a fashion as possible. But are we not more likely to think of parents and even plan for them as a group labeled "the parents"? Far too often we set up parent-teacher conferences to proceed in an orderly fashion, as if we might expect all parents to respond in approximately the same way. If we do not recognize that parents are different too, we may find ourselves frequently distressed or disappointed at the failure of a conference. A parent's ready acquiescence we may come to realize is only a polite, external veneer, masking a real lack of communication between teacher and parents.

Parents are indeed different one from another, both in their relationships with their own children and their feelings and reactions toward school. They have their own backgrounds, their own problems, their own difficulties with relationships, their own tensions. Some parents are better able to relate to their children than others. Some are warm and supporting, others may be rejecting or even negligent. Some we will find highly intelligent, competent people; others may be mentally inadequate, unable to grasp the meaning of situations involving their children, even though they may love them. Some have a high regard for education, but there will be others who look upon schooling as something to be lived through because it is required by law. Values differ among parents. The goals and standards for their individual families will differ one from another and, indeed, may be quite different from our own.

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Parents Are Individuals Too

Parents bring their individuality to the conference. Until the teacher knows parents as individuals and is sensitive to and willing to accept their individuality, it will be difficult to establsh any clear communication between them.

Teachers need to be realistic in that they may not be able to achieve all they would like to achieve in contacts with parents. Some parents respond better than others, others cannot be reached effectively at all.

But most parents have real concern for their children, for the progress of each youngster. They are eager to come to conferences and are attentive as teachers talk with them about the progress or the problem of each child. With such parents it is easy to communicate and teachers can often be helpful; parents, in turn, can be helpful to teachers. Many of these parents can be helpful to their children, but among them are the well-intentioned who want to provide the right guidance for their children, but seem unable to do so effectively. In some cases tension has arisen between parents and their children because the parents do not know what to expect of a youngster. They may be expecting too much. Pressures on the child may have built up to the point where the child has become overanxious or even hostile to his parents. Oftentimes, the teacher can, from an objective point of view, help parents by giving them a more realistic understanding of what can be expected of their child.

Other parents are so immature that although they may seem to listen to matter-of-fact discussion, and to agree, they lack the ability to be adults in their relationships with their children. Such parents mean well, but they have never really grown up themselves to the point at which they can assume parental responsibility. With their own interests predominantly first, they pay attention to their children only when the children's needs and interests do not interfere with their own concerns.

It is discouraging to teachers to enlist the help of those parents for the benefit of the child. In such cases teachers may have to help the child as much as possible while he is in the classroom, realizing that little consistent help can be expected from the parents at home.

The Young Parent

But there is a type of immature parent who is capable of genuine, satisfying cooperation with teachers and that is the parent to be found among the increasing number of very young parents whose children are coming into kindergartens and primary grades. Many of these parents, who may have married at eighteen or nineteen or even younger, are indeed very young to be carrying parental responsibility. Today around half of first children are born to mothers who are twenty or younger. Although many young parents are surprisingly competent, others are still rightfully immature but steadily growing toward a responsible adulthood. They are eager younger parents, but often they have not grown far beyond their own adolescence and are sometimes bewildered by their parental responsibilities. They want guidance and will almost invariably listen to teachers, share experiences with their children and ply teachers with questions. Some are anxious for more help than teachers can realistically give in the time there is to spend with them. Parent study groups sponsored by the school usually attract many of these young parents. This is a crucial time in developing communication with these parents not only in individual conferences, but also in group grade meetings.

The Troubled Parent

Some parents are so deeply disturbed by their own problems that they cannot be reached in any effective fashion; neither can teachers anticipate that they may be able to meet their children's problems. It is perhaps unwise to try to have more than a routine contact with a parent who is emotionally disturbed. Their problems, and often those of their children who may also be disturbed, can be helped only by therapy, which cannot be offered through the school. Sometimes it is important to be able to recognize that a parent is so emotionally involved in his own problem that the teacher-parent conference is being used as a release for a parent problem. A very disturbed parent may try to take much of a teacher's time pouring out troubles or draw a kindly teacher into commenting upon family difficulties to a depth of involvement which would become unwise and futile. Such a parent may even encroach upon the home life of a teacher, calling frequently and asking for solutions. The alert teacher, in such circumstances, will consult with her principal or the school psychologist concerning ways in which to handle this parent wisely.

The Angry and the Overanxious

The occasional angry parent who seriously threatens a teacher cannot usually be handled by the teacher alone. The teacher would be well advised to listen until the anger subsides and refrain from reacting with indignation or animosity. If, however, the parent does not grow calmer the principal needs to be called in at once to be present during the conference.

The parents whose anger is not so much directed toward teachers as toward their own child are those whose relationship with their youngster is so tense and punishing that the teacher soon learns that she cannot tell them that Johnie is not keeping up with his arithmetic for, unfortunately, Johnie is sure to be beaten for his low grades or have many privileges taken away or restrictions overly severe placed upon him.

Perhaps the most difficult parents are the genuinely concerned but overanxious parents who want to help their child do well in school. They are so cooperative that they may, following a conference, place over-pressures on the child. One teacher found, to her distress, that a suggestion that a mother read to her youngster had resulted in the child's being kept in from after-school play for an hour of reading with her mother.

Yes, teachers do have to get to know the parents in order to know how much and what kind of information can be shared with them. Teachers learn about parents by listening to them in conference periods and by gathering all pertinent information from school records and other teachers who have known the parents in previous years. Even during too-short scheduled conference periods teachers can become sensitive not only to what parents may say but how they say it and even to their bodily reactions. Let us consider the clue to be gained from the parent's exclamation—"I'll see that he does better! He has to buckle down!" Let us respect the expression of concern lest a child be pushed too hard. Let us recognize the anxiety that creeps into the questions, even the brief ones that a parent asks, or the stiffening of the body when the report is not good. Insight is gained not only through words, but through tensions or feelings of warm concern which a parent passes on, reactions that can be guides in planning special conferences when problems must be gone into in more depth than a short conference period will permit.

It is probably unwise to share more than is absolutely necessary with a punishing parent, for the teacher would realize that the overseverity of the punishment could intensify rather than remedy the child's problem. With the aim to release tension rather than feed overconcern and growing anxiety, we would try to stress the strengths of the youngster rather than our concerns. We might make one simple suggestion of something which the overanxious parent could do that would make him feel that he was being helpful to his own child. To be avoided are such vague statements as, "Your child needs more of your attention" or "Your child needs to be more relaxed."

With the stable parent it is possible and desirable to make plans together for the best interests of their child. A warm relationship can be established and more open and frank inviting of cooperation as teachers listen to their suggestions and impressions of their youngster and his problems. Although such a relationship cannot successfully be established with either the punishing, rejecting or the overconcerned parent, teachers can cultivate the art of learning how much to say or when to say little but offer encouragement instead.

It is important, too, to become aware of reality situations that can affect the parent-child relationship. It would be unthinkable to ask a harried mother of six children, living under less than desirable circumstances, to pay more attention to the state of her children's clothes. To achieve improvements here, the teacher would need to work through the school nurse, the school social worker, or some other agency that might offer help to the mother.

Parent Sensitivity

Parents may bring to a conference some personal feelings about their own school experiences that may carry over into their feelings about their child's own school or about schools and teachers in general. One competent executive father, well used to meeting and talking with people, confessed with some amazement that he experienced the same "butterflies in his stomach" that he had had as a little boy in school when he approached his son's teacher to talk about a misdemeanor. He said, "I was still scared of what she was going to do and say!"

Some parents may be sensitive in another area. Their own school days may have been unpleasant; they may have been among the boys and girls who were left out. Perhaps they were shy and found it hard to mix. Perhaps school work was too difficult, and they constantly experienced embarrassment and failure. Perhaps they were among those rejected by other students and even teachers, because they were of a minority group or were not as adequately dressed or as clean as other boys and girls. Perhaps their language was, and still may be, inadequate, crude or even considered undesirable. It is not likely that these parents will feel comfortable, even now, when they are asked to come to school. Indeed, many of them will be among those who do not come without special effort by the teacher to draw them in.

Many parents are understandably hesitant to come to a conference, particularly a conference called because a problem has arisen, because they feel that they have failed in bringing up their youngsters and that they will be held responsible for that failure. All too often teachers put blame on the shoulders of parents for the behavior and well-being of their children, blame that should not always rest there. They may have tried hard against adverse circumstances, but since they are necessarily subjective in relationships with their children, in many cases they feel that their child is a reflection of themselves. Failure upon the part of a child becomes the parents' personal failure. If the teacher adds to the normal sensitivities of parents concerning

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their children by suggesting blame in words or by manner, their defenses are likely to go up and communication between parent and teacher will be far less effective.

The cliché, "behind every problem child there is a problem parent," is not always true. Many circumstances impinging upon the life of a family may make the bringing up of children no easy matter. This is why it is so important, too, for teachers to accept parents as individuals with their own problems, their own perplexities, their strengths and their weaknesses. There will be success in communicating with parents to the extent that teachers can genuinely try to accept them as they accept the children of parents.

Understanding Differences in Children

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and

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For centuries parents, educators, pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists and many others have been concerned with the differences in children. Many differences have been noted and analyzed. Some have been discarded as unimportant while others have created real concern. One area that has received a great deal of attention in the past decade is that of perceptual-motor difference.

Interest has grown rapidly because more and more correlation has been found between perceptual-motor deficits and learning disabilities. But more important than the recognition of the differences and their implications is the knowledge that correction of perceptual-motor deficits makes the remediation of many learning disabilities easier. Less time is required and the results are more permanent. To insure success in perceptual-motor training, however, more than the clinician must be involved. Of particular importance are the child's parents and his teachers. All concerned must be able to communicate with one another.

Communication presupposes more than verbalization and written words. It is the conveying of ideas using any and all avenues available until those involved are speaking the same language, seeing the same deficits and understanding how they relate to learning. Without this kind of communication the results of training are often less than anticipated.

This fact has been graphically illustrated in our work at the Achievement Center over the past decade.

In the early years we evaluated the child while the parents sweated it out in the waiting room. Later the parents were called in for counseling and, if we felt the child could be helped, appointments were made for weekly sessions with a therapist at the Center. Results were disappointing; even though we saw improvement at the clinic there was little, if any, carry-over at home or in school.

We then tried giving the parents a few recommendations, carefully explained, for working with the child at home to reinforce what was being done by the therapist. This method was found much more effective in those cases where the parents interpreted our recommendations as we had intended. But too often we found that they had not understood the terminology used or the methods described.

The realization that we were not communicating with parents set

us to debating among ourselves as to whether we should continue to work through the parents or try to work only through the schools and other agencies.

Four factors swung the decisions in favor of the parents:

1. Most of the parents wanted to be involved, to help their child and needed the involvement to develop a better relationship with the child.
2. Many of the children were not yet of school age and, therefore, the parents were the only logical therapists.
3. Many of the activities assigned required a one-to-one relationship between therapist and child.
4. Teachers do not have time to give the child with a perceptual-motor deficit the amount of attention and help he requires, so the education continues to depend, at least in part, on his parents.

Parent Education Program

Thus was born our Parent Education Program. From the beginning, we knew that such a program would have to involve more than parental counseling. Not that the latter wasn't necessary; it just was not enough. Even when counseling was done realistically, with sympathy and understanding, even when we endeavored to help them accept the child at the level where he could perform and experience success, it was not enough.

Acceptance and the ability to live with an atypical child is only the beginning. Parents are the first to realize this simple fact. How often, after they have received a complete diagnosis of their child plus an assorted collection of directives, do they, with great expectancy in their voices, eagerly ask one last question, "What can we do to help our child?"!

It is here that Parent Education begins. Knowing that there is much parents can do and that tutors or teachers are seldom as dedicated and determined to succeed as are parents, we finally decided to involve them in all phases of a four-day diagnostic training program, with steps as follows:

Observation: The parents observe as the Perceptual Motor Survey and other evaluative instruments are administered. They are also given a summary sheet to follow so that they know what the examiner is looking for and why.

Lectures and Group discussions: They attend a series of lectures that review normal development; point out the how, why and when of perceptual-motor deficits and the resulting interference with learning and behavior development. These sessions are followed by group discussions and question-and-answer-periods, where parents find it easy to express themselves because other parents have similar problems and the coordinator has already proven his knowledge and understanding through lectures.

Training: From the first day the parents observe as a therapist initiates the training program, explaining procedures to them and the child (when the child is old enough to understand) as he works. The parents are then given some of the activities which they observed to practice as homework before the next morning's session.

The following day the parents work with the child under the supervision of the therapist; any errors in communication are corrected.

They are then given at least one unsupervised practice session. Much of the embarrassment experienced in attacking a new field with someone watching the first clumsy attempts can thus be reduced.

Throughout the week, the correlation between motor and academic learning is stressed. Parents often ask, "How does movement relate to learning?" By the end of the training sessions, they come to the realization that the young child cannot learn except through movement and his education will be complete only to the extent that his movements are flexible and coordinated. At first they are skeptical, then fascinated as they begin to see: (1) how much learning takes place during the first few years of life, (2) how the infant and toddler learns to coordinate his hands, body, and eyes and uses them to gather information about his environment, (3) how this early learning is the base on which all future learning must be built, and (4) how many of their child's behavior problems are the result of his perceptual-motor problems. They soon are able to see the need for reinforcing or even rebuilding this perceptual-motor base, if the child's early learning has been rigid and limited, before they dare look forward to the anticipation of academic achievement.

Understanding Perceptual-Motor Problems

In the area of speech, the parents are surprised to find that a major deterrent to their child's development of adequate speech may be his inability to control and manipulate the movements of his tongue, lips and jaws, in order to form the necessary sounds, words or sentences. After this discovery, they find it easy to see the close correlation between speech difficulties and the poor eating habits observed in so many of the children, for eating and speaking require controlled use of many of the same body parts.

In the area of readiness, the parents learn the necessity for coordinated control of the hands and eyes as prerequisites for reading and writing. They learn how the small child spends weeks, months and even years developing such control in numberless activities as he watches his hands at work and at play.

Even when tackling behavior problems, the parents learn the advisability of using a motor task when teaching the child the art of self-control. They learn to use tasks that are at his performance level and to structure his work and his environment as the case demands. Thus, they find they can keep him productively occupied for longer periods of time and they see behavior improve.

Finally the parents are ready for a parent conference. They are now capable of discussing their child and his problems, asking intelligent questions and understanding the therapist's summary of the staff findings and recommendations. They are also assured that they will not be left to their own devices but will be expected to report to the Center every two months through letters and 8 mm films showing their observations of their child's activities and their own actions. In return they will receive answers to their questions and will be corrected if the films show them to have been in error. Recommendations for further therapy will be made and re-evaluations scheduled as needed.

This program has proven efficient and effective. The first successes reported by parents were the very things formerly hoped for through counseling. Parents ceased to be plagued with feelings of frustration and inadequacy. They were so busy doing something positive that they no longer had time for depression and guilt. Because they have been learning to control the child's overt behavior, the home environment

has quieted down and home life becomes more pleasant for all.

The child begins to relax and his frustrations lessen, for he now has someone helping him control his world. Less and less often does he need or want to be aggressive, moody, hyperactive or withdrawn.

Furthermore, he begins to experience success in areas where he had known nothing but failure. He is again learning.

Teacher Education

Having asked for reports from schools on all school age children, we received in return requests from teachers for reports on the child and recommendations applicable in the classroom; soon we realized that we were facing the same communication problem with teachers that we had had with the parents. Teachers, feeling a lack of communication, were asking for book lists and other materials to prepare themselves for tackling the perceptual-motor problems in their classrooms.

Teachers came for conferences, but again that was not enough. They came with parents for the week's evaluation and went away with a much better understanding of that one child. But what about the others in their classroom who needed help?

Demand increased, and to meet this demand workshops were initiated in the fall of 1968, workshops that are action experiences and not merely abstract auditory and visual communications. The teacher becomes involved through direct participation in the evaluation and training as well as in parent lectures, conferences and report writing.

Realizing that we could never reach the number of teachers seeking information about, and training methods for, perceptual-motor deficits, an in-service Training Program was introduced in January 1969. It is presented in three stages.

Stage 1, conducted at the Glen Haven Achievement Center, is a three-week intensive course for one or more key persons from a school. There are audiovisual presentations, in-depth discussion with the staff, participation in therapy with the children at the Center and access to all the resources of the Center.

In Stage 2 the key person plans and carries out a training program for practicing teachers on the staff of his school. Sound films and a complete syllabus are provided as teaching aids.

Finally, a professional consultant from the Center visits each school and is available to the trainees and administrators involved in the local program.

This is communication. Working together, the staff at the Center, the parents of the children and their teachers are finally beginning to understand not only the differences in children but how to communicate this understanding to each other.

Working With Parents

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The development of a mutually beneficial home-school relationship demands a perceptive, knowledge-based recognition of the complexity of human emotions and of basic human needs. Possibly there is no more sensitive area to be invaded than that constituted by the depth of emotional investment and identification inherent in the bond between parent and child. The teacher-parent relationship must build upon a shared concern for the educational progress of the child. A factor in its effectiveness, however, will be the subtle but powerful influence exerted by the past experiences of each participant as well as the degree to which these experiences may have shaped the self-esteem needs of the individuals involved. These are among the enormous variables that determine in large part the perceptions, reactions, and basic openness of both teacher and parent.

The Child's Reflection of Attitudes: Home and School

It is undeniably the child who precipitates the initial reaction of the home toward the current classroom teacher, although a general attitude toward the school itself may have been formed on the basis of community opinion and previous contact. The child who returns home from his first days at school revealing through his comments and behavior an acceptance, respect, and admiration for his teacher sets the stage for trust and open communication between home and school. But an unfortunate school situation, which wrings a tense and discouraged "She's mean. I hate her! She yells at us all the time!" from a small son or daughter understandably creates anxiety and doubt as to the skills and insight of the teacher involved.

Parents are held responsible by society for judiciously screening and selecting the experiences that touch the lives of their children; yet rarely do they have a voice in the selection of individual teachers. Parental concern that this immensely significant individual be one who will respect the integrity and ascertain and nourish the unique strengths of their child is both a legitimate and a creditable one. Much of the young child's perception of himself and others will be reflections of the attitudes, values and expectations he perceives in his teacher. Her role in his social, emotional and intellectual development will be

major. Small wonder that parents breathe a sigh of relief at early indications that this influential stranger apparently "likes" Johnny. Johnny after all will be living an impressionable part of his life in an environment of her making for the duration of a school year. Home-school communication on every level will hopefully reinforce for parents the belief that the teacher is in fact the healthy, accepting, knowledgeable human being one can entrust with responsibilities of such magnitude.

In these areas of lasting import, the school is indisputably accountable to the parent. Indeed, a major obstacle that the school must seek to overcome through honest and direct communication is the pervasive sentiment that there is little parents can do to effect change in the quality of the classroom experience. It is precisely this feeling of impotency and alienation from the classroom lives of their children that has precipitated for some the moderate to angry cries for community control of schools. Partisan sympathies aside, surely involvement and commitment are better than the passive withdrawal of many parents.

"It's a rare school where any parent is welcome." "What good would it do?" "Next year has got to be better. . . ." "She'd probably take it out on Susan. . . ." "I don't want to be a complainer. . . ." "She makes me feel so small."

Schools Can Initiate Communication

Meaningful dialogue between home and school needs to be not only possible, but it must necessarily be skillfully cultivated by the institution as a matter of policy and recognized as an avenue of healthy self-evaluation. More often professed than practiced, such a philosophical redirection will require full administrative commitment as well as genuine acceptance and support by the professional staff.

Teachers need and should have preparatory training in the dynamics of parent-teacher communication, but the more basic requirements are competence, quiet self-confidence, empathy and acceptance. Parents have much to give the school. Their knowledge of the child is often invaluable in providing the teacher with insight and consequent direction. Realistically, the intellect cannot be dealt with apart from the many forces and influences that make each child respond uniquely to the learning situation. Past history, family structure, parental expectations, sibling personalities, aptitudes and abilities are vital factors in the totality that is the child.

Conversely, the parent seeks from the teacher information for which he has no other source—a reliable picture of the child as he comes to grips with the academic expectations of the school and as he functions in a scholastic setting among his peers. The parent seeks and should receive increased insight into teaching methods and techniques. When the child is not progressing satisfactorily the parent is entitled to immediate full discussion and specific guidance as to the role he may constructively play in strengthening areas of weakness.

One promising technique for clarifying academic goals and educational methodology in an atmosphere of cooperative involvement is a materials workshop for parents and teachers. Under the direction of an articulate and enthusiastic staff member, parents and teachers together analyze instructional materials and, extracting principles and concepts, develop original improvised products for the classroom or home. Discussion during the work period ranges from learning theory through evaluation to product validity and application. A shared problem-solving experience can add significance to joint concerns of the home and school.

Setting the Stage for Dialogue

Parents who have received reassurance that the school is sincerely interested in partnership, who have enjoyed casual and friendly contacts through notes, brief meetings, class newsletters, telephone messages, the PTA, turn naturally to the teaching staff for consultation when the need arises. A pleasant spot away from the teacher's desk where she will be less likely to be viewed as an authority figure helps to put parents at ease, particularly parents from the lower socio-economic range where school experiences generally have been linked with failure.

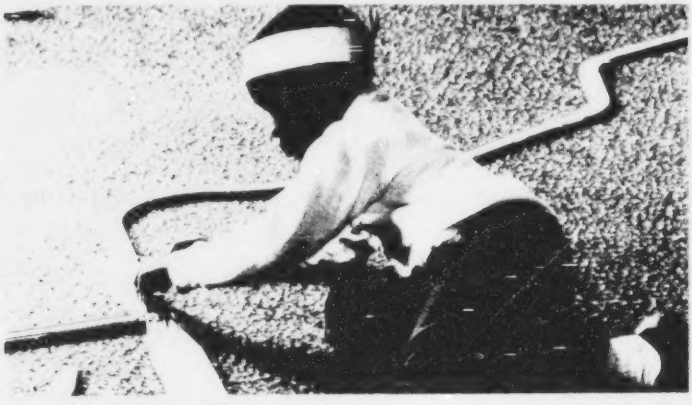
In large or relatively uncrowded schools it may be possible to set aside space for a parents' lounge where the PTA may provide coffee and comfortable chairs to make an informal conference setting. In less spacious surroundings, the library corner of the classroom or a niche set off attractively at the end of a hallway may be quite suitable.

Despite informality, parents will expect and should find teachers fully prepared to discuss in depth all aspects of the child's school life. A review of the student's work before the conference helps the teacher consolidate views of the child and to respond to parents' questions with an accurate appraisal of his progress and capabilities. Should the services of the speech therapist, school psychologist, remedial reading teacher or other auxiliary staff be pertinent to a discussion of the child's adjustment, a joint conference may be advantageous to all concerned.

Parental concerns run the gamut from problems of individual student adjustment to homework assignments to bewilderment at reported cafeteria and playground policies. Most questions fall within the province of the classroom teacher and quite properly are answered by her. Typically, those questions not directly under the teacher's jurisdiction are so reported and dismissed. It might be a good thing to have a systematic method of channeling those legitimate school-wide concerns expressed in parent conferences to a central source where they could be tabulated and periodically evaluated by all concerned.

Within the classroom, the focus of education is slowly but inevitably turning from a preoccupation with isolated facts toward methods of inquiry, techniques of problem solving and exploration of interrelationships, cause and effect.

There is a critical need for this forward movement to be accompanied by an abrupt shift away from the traditional inward orientation of the school toward a new open-door policy that both recognizes and makes efficient use of the significant educational and protective role of the home.



The Teacher Profits Too

By NAN JACKSON
Elementary School Teacher
Glenallen Elementary School
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As I thought about this topic, "The Teacher Profits Too," it seemed to me presumptive to assume that teachers always profit from communicating with parents and children. Should not the title be phrased as a question—"Something To Wonder About—Does the Teacher Profit Too?"

The act of communicating, in itself, does not necessarily produce profitable outcomes. It may even work to the detriment of the child, the parent, or the teacher—and, if detrimental to any one of these, is it not in some way detrimental to all involved? (I suppose, though, it could be argued that even these unfortunate communications yield certain information regarding a situation in which one finds oneself and clues to what one is "up against" in preparing for the future.) It follows, however, that there must be degrees to which various communications are profitable to the teacher.

There is no profit to a teacher where there is no profit to the child! Information dispensed without, in the end, benefiting the child is wasted effort.

How can we assess the effects of diverse methods used in communicating with parents and pupils? The more precisely and squarely the hammer hits the platform (as in the carnival game of testing strength), the higher the puck rises toward the bell. Any communication dispensing information that (1) *merely broadens understanding of a given situation*, may be dubbed "A Little Leaguer." If the communication goes beyond understanding and (2) *develops a supportive attitude*, I dub it "A Minor Leaguer." The communication that (3) further enlists *supportive action* and thereby increases the profit-yield, is "A Major Leaguer." But should the outcome of the communication (4) *result in real educational growth*—behavioral change, it has "rung the bell," "won the penant," and may rightfully be dubbed "Champion."

Measuring Benefit to the Child

As there is always room for growth, shouldn't the most effective type of communication produce some detectable beneficial effect? The value of our techniques may be measured by the degree to which growth takes place and behaviors are beneficially altered (from what had been or from what might have been had no communication occurred). Since a long-range effect is of more value than a temporary effect, the profit may be figured over the period of its effectiveness. Theoretically then, the effect (E) may be multiplied by the time factor (T) to arrive at a profit-yield reading (P), keeping in mind, that a detrimental effect also may persist over a period of time giving a negative yield to all involved.

The Teacher Profits Too
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How would these actual, not too unusual, incidents have scored on the scale of communicational effect?

During the second week of school the note came. The little first grader carried it home in his fist, anxious to hear its contents. The mother hopefully opened this, the first communique from school. It read simply . . . "Dear Mrs. Johnson, Ricky's shyness is working against him! Sincerely, Miss Taylor."

The psychologist, pupil personnel worker, the principal and two teachers sat in a circle around Dale's mother. Facts concerning Dale's social, emotional, and physical make-up poured from each participant as well as an account of Dale's academic progress —or lack of it! He was compared with other seven-year-olds of similar average ability. He was, they said, a loving and a lovable child. They conceded he had weathered several traumatic family experiences as well as might be expected of any young, sensitive child. They said, too, that he was a perfectionist but was easily discouraged. In conclusion, all agreed Dale had a poor self-image and the conference closed with a recommendation for "Special education"—elsewhere. The mother, contemplating the hopelessness of the alternative, got up with tears in her eyes and walked quietly out the door.

Laura's report card indicated "A" work in most subject areas, but her parents knew how disappointed she was in junior high where most assignments dealt with old, familiar subject matter and skills well-learned in a nongraded elementary school. At the conference with members of the teaching staff, Laura's parents were informed of the reasons for requiring the use of seventh-grade texts. It was explained, though, that her "accelerated group" would be expected to complete this material in three-fourths the time it would take a slower group to complete it.

Information was communicated in all three instances. What do you think were the outcomes? Would the effects persist over a short or a long period of time? Were they beneficial to the total child, and, if not to the child, how then to the parent or the teacher?

What kinds of information can be communicated to increase the profit-yield over the usual progress-to-date reports? Consider the resultant behavioral changes that might occur if the communication points the way to new ventures in learning, furnishes clues to next steps, suggests possible resources and their use, indicates talents and strengths upon which we might build, enlarges upon interests, and builds an awareness of the child's physical, social, and emotional needs, which must be taken into consideration in planning to meet his intellectual needs. Because these factors are in continual flux, communication needs to be continuous and channels need to be kept open and operative. Dependence on a predetermined periodic schedule is not enough. Communication delayed until a crisis has developed increases the difficulty of precipitating a beneficial change and multiplies the time and effort involved.

The Give and Take Both Ways

Communication becomes a soliloquy if teachers assume that they are to be "The Great Dispensers" or "The Major Dispensers" of the pertinent, up-to-date information that needs to be acted upon to bring about this beneficial change. Communication is, as defined by Webster, "intercourse by words, letters, or messages; interchange of thoughts and opinions." By definition, communication must involve the child in *dialogue* with the teacher; a dialogue through which he communicates his thoughts and opinions. It requires a certain open

receptivity on the part of the teacher to keep the flow of information honest and forthright. To complete the circuit, the same type of dialogue must be transmitted between child and parent, between parent and teacher. If the most effective teacher communication results in some beneficial change in patterns of behavior and growth, shouldn't it follow that effective pupil and parent communication ought to have a similar effect on patterns of teacher behavior? This is to say that an effective three-way system of communicating pertinent, up-to-date information ought to be the basis for determining the "what," "where," "when," "how" and "why" of what a child learns and the role that the teacher and parent play in his education.

If we as teachers seek maximum returns, we need to (1) set up an on-going system through which the child (and parents, too) feed us this pertinent, timely information about the physical, social, emotional and academic factors that affect the child as a learner; (2) provide a variety of means to encourage and promote dialogue (for the child—conferences, discussion, written expression, role playing, opinion polls, expression through art, and other ways: for the parent—conferences, seminars, informal conversations, written messages, newsletters, visitations); (3) be receptive to the information communicated in these ways and through habits, interactions, facial expressions and other patterns of behavior; (4) act on the information received in providing the kinds of educational opportunities likely to be most beneficial to the child.

Dividends from Three-Way Communication

What are the profits to be derived from this plan? Among other things, the child sees himself as an important human being whose opinions, feelings and interests are valued; one who participates in decisions affecting his immediate future. The parent finds himself teamed up with today's youth rather than alienated from him. He feels important to his child's education, success and happiness. He feels important to his child. He feels important!

The teacher finds the parent and child understanding and supportive teammates. Next steps are sensed by teacher, pupil and parent. Decisions arrived at jointly with pupils bring dividends in pupil commitment. Pupils become increasingly self-propelled, seeking less frequent consultation and aid from the teacher. The more pupils participate in setting individual goals, the more skillful they become in self-evaluation. The pupil becomes more proficient at diagnosing his own weaknesses, realizing his strengths and utilizing what he finds out about himself to become a more efficient learner. Surely, the teacher feels increasingly successful as pupils develop these skills, reach goals, and feel good about themselves. Beyond the personal satisfaction of "a job well done," there is certain to be a good measure of gratitude heaped upon the teacher by the student and the parent who also share in the successful effort.

This is the day and the age to "tell it as it is." Let's take a long, hard look at ourselves—and do it! Let's confront ourselves with the possibilities for becoming more effective! Let's protest any attempt on our part to maintain the status quo in our classroom! Let's activate ourselves to responsive involvement! Let's also dedicate ourselves to the preservation of individual freedoms and rights as we attempt to help the child prepare for his future.

For the degree to which we teachers use pupil and parent clues to develop a program and to adapt our role to meet the individual's needs, to that extent the child profits; and, we can conclude—to that extent *The Teacher Profits Too!*

Parent-Readiness for Kindergarten

By GERALDINE TWINING
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Assistant Professor,
Illinois State University, Bloomington

A good beginning for both the parent and the child will help the school achieve its goal in educating the child.

Following pre-registration in the spring, it is a good practice for the school principal and/or the teachers to invite parents for a meeting devoted to learning about kindergarten. An evening meeting is preferred so that fathers can be present. Many times the mother is the chief communicator between the school and the home.

It is most important to help parents understand that kindergarten is not a group babysitting session, a copy of the first grade, a supervised recreational center, a substitute for the family, a center of competition, a show place, or a rigid set of requirements, but that kindergarten is a roomful of children acquiring knowledge through new experiences under the guidance of a capable and well-prepared teacher, in a comfortable atmosphere where parents are always welcome.

Teachers are often viewed as a threat by the kindergarten parent. What the teacher says to the kindergarten child becomes almost law. It is good for the parent to know that the child talks about him or her at school as much as he talks about the teacher at home.

Attitudes of Parents

The kindergarten year through many planned experiences is aimed at developing wholesome attitudes in the child toward self, work, school and others. Hopefully, he will build automatic behavior patterns and a deep appreciation for other people and their worth. Parents should be helped to understand that opportunities will be provided for him to express himself creatively, to do independent thinking and problem solving, and to widen his understandings, knowledge and skills, and that academic learning is an outcome of work toward these goals. The progress the kindergartener makes with one goal will lead to progress in others. Since kindergarteners are likely to reflect their parents' attitudes toward school, helping the parent to feel confident, eager for the beginning of school and sure that the child can manage for himself will help the child.

Parents gain confidence and a sense of closeness to the school when they are given detailed information about what supplies their kindergartener will need on registration day and how much they will cost. They should be informed of the type of clothing worn by most kinder-

garten youngsters, such as play clothes or shorts, and the hours for arrival and departure from school so that they can plan their schedule or babysitting needs accordingly. Most parents are happy to be told or reminded of the importance for kindergarteners' celebrating their birthdays at school, and like to be told if they may contribute cookies or other refreshments.

Very important information for parents is of the special services provided by the school system of, for instance, the help available for a child with a serious speech problem; of the duties of the school nurse; of the kinds of help available for emotional problems; and of the testing services provided by the school system.

Information Helpful to Parents

Parents appreciate suggestions of purchasing clothing that children can put on and fasten without help, and an explanation that muscle development of the child is not at the level to cope with small buttons on coats, caps that tie, and boots that are too small. In school, especially, the child can become needlessly upset and frustrated with inappropriate clothing. If possible, the child should be taken on a shopping trip to try on the clothing before it is purchased. In this way, the parent and the child both know that he can manage his clothing. Parents who understand will try to teach the child to tie his shoes before he comes to school, which will give him a feeling of confidence and give the teacher more time to help the child learn other things. It is important to stress the importance of the child's knowledge of his name, address, and telephone number in case he does lose his way to or from school.

This is also a good time to explain the purpose and valuable learnings in sharing of interest items brought from home and to suggest some item that the child might bring and how he might be asked to share it.

Parents may question why fire drills are held so early in the school year. An explanation of the state law and a brief review of the safety rules may allay feelings of fright experienced by many kindergarteners. Parents, if previously informed by the teacher, will talk with the child before he comes to school about the duties of the local fire department and about fire safety in their home.

A display and explanation by the teacher of the supplies needed for kindergarten can be very helpful to parents. They will then know the type of tennis shoe, crayons, scissors, smock, and rug needed by the kindergartener and can make these purchases before school begins in the fall. The kindergartener will gain confidence by knowing that he has his supplies for school. It is important that the child's name be on each article he brings to school and that he has been taught how to care for his things, thus reducing doubts and concern of both parent and child for loss of his property.

This day, when parents are invited for "orientation," is a good opportunity for members of the Parent-Teacher Association to offer their services in giving information and perhaps to provide simple refreshments for a social hour. Parents should be encouraged to become acquainted with the kindergarten room and equipment. Knowing where their child will be spending his kindergarten day and the activities involved will help parents visualize the child's explanations of his school.

Involving parents in the reporting process, an important part of the kindergarten program, will be more valuable if parents can decide what type of report or conference they would prefer. Realization that the behavior of their kindergartener is similar to that of the others of

his age group is helpful to parents. The teacher can help them to understand that all children are not expected to develop at the same rate, that some children adjust easily to kindergarten and that others are more reluctant. This understanding will help to give them confidence in sending their child to school.

One good way to stimulate interest in the beginning of school and to help the kindergartener develop a concept of time between registration day before school is out in the spring and the first day of school in the fall, is for the teacher to provide some special interest such as sunflower seeds, peanuts, or other seeds or plants for the prekindergartener and his parents to plant and watch grow during the summer. The child can look forward to bringing the seedlings or plants to school in the fall. This can be exciting for the child and help to build child, parent, school rapport.

A kindergarten room can suffer turmoil if the pupil and the parent are consciously, or even subconsciously, afraid of what the beginning of school can hold. A separate room or lounge or other appropriate meeting room where parents can share their feelings with each other will enable parents to accept the beginning of school with pleasure and confidence. Their confidence will influence the kindergarteners' introduction to school in the same manner.

Communication in Guidance

By HARRIETTE MERHILL
1968-69 ACEI Fellow

Meg's letter to her sister is not an unusual description for today. More and more families are on the move, and even children who stay in one community for their entire school careers will almost certainly have to change schools more than once before they finish high school. New technology and innovative programs are influencing school organizational patterns and bringing changing styles of learning into the classroom. Meg not only describes a few for us, but her letter to her sister poses several questions for consideration:

> Dear Sis,
>
> We have arrived at our new home safe and sound . . . and today I managed to get all four kids into schools. It was quite a job, and now I am beginning to wonder if I'll ever keep them all straight.
>
> Sharon is very happy, or I believe that she will be, in a private nursery school not too far from here. The school is attractive, lots of room and not too many children. The teacher has some real understandings—I think—for the feelings of young children and their parents. She was willing to give me quite a bit of time the other day for a conference and wanted to know a lot about our "four-year-old princess." The school's program is a good one and you would be pleased.
>
> Bill is at a new ungraded school. It is going to take me awhile to get his program and all of his teachers organized in my mind . . . the school is quite different from the last two he has attended. Poor little fellow, did you realize that this is the fourth school for him in the past three years? And he is only nine! He thought he recognized the lady in the office as someone who lives on our street. Maybe we can get better acquainted and she can help me find out more about the school as we go along.
>
> Jeannie dreaded entering the Junior High School. I must say, I didn't blame her. It is a tremendous building flowing with children. She wondered—and frankly so did I—how she would ever find her way around . . . or make any friends. The guidance

counselor was very nice to us both and I believe that Jeannie felt better when she met the "buddy" who had been asked to be her special guide and help her get acquainted. But I felt so sorry for Jeannie. She'll never remember all her numbers. A student number, a homeroom number, a new house number, book locker number, gym locker number, bus number, class section number, and our new telephone number. To add to her confusion, and mine, the school is on some sort of flexible scheduling which is done, of course, by computers. The teachers probably do have names, but on her schedule card all we could find were some more numbers . . . 007 intrigued me. Well, at least we know her counselor's name, thank goodness—and I've tucked that and her phone number away for ready use. Something tells me our twelve-year-old and her parents are going to need a lot of "counseling" before we find our place.

Tim was acting most nonchalant while we settled the others, but I am convinced it was just an act. If I thought the Junior High was big—you should see the High School! It took 30 minutes just to find a parking place. Fifteen-year-old boys can get very impatient with mothers acting as chauffeurs. We spent quite a bit of time here getting credits straightened out, etc. This seems to become more and more complicated as we move about. Tim's counselor was most helpful and our chat was pleasant as well as informative. This school has—modular scheduling! Whatever that is. Tim seemed to think it was just great. The sports and music programs might still be in conflict—I do wish that boy could make up his mind. I'll try to arrange for an appointment with the counselor—or somebody to talk to—I would just love to know more about his real abilities . . . maybe I can get to talk with one of his teachers sometime, perhaps the counselor can arrange it. This school also schedules classes by computer and with that modular bit—it has me floored!

We had an escorted tour around the building with Tim getting more and more enthused and me getting more and more bewildered. Large groups, small groups, carrels for individualized study, learning labs and centers for learning . . . these were just a few of the strange-sounding terms I heard used today.

As I toured these new school buildings—I tried to catch a glimpse of the teachers—these "others" in the life of my children. I must admit I could not readily identify them, for the teachers' desks seemed to be either non-existent or well hidden. Children in all of the classes that I saw were not even seated in the usual desks and chairs arrangement. The teachers *must have been* there! I'm sure that I'll get to meet them very soon because they have PLANNED CONFERENCES at all of the schools.

Later:

I didn't get to finish this earlier, but I knew you wouldn't mind a postscript with the children's reaction.

At dinner this evening, we tried to bring Bob up to date. I believe the day has gone when we could ask a youngster, "What's your teacher's name?" and get a simple answer. Our four seemed to be busy in a competition of "numbers." Bill is a bit unhappy because Jeannie and Tim apparently have more teachers than he has—although we were made to understand that he still has "two to come"—art and special resources teachers. His count, therefore, without them was only four. Jeannie came up with eight—she has hopes of one more if she can get to be in the chorus. Tim

wasn't certain whether it was nine or ten for him. . . . Bill says that he must be counting aides. Even little Sharon boasted about her "teachers" in multiples.

Bob and I will be most anxiously awaiting those conferences, the news letters, and we'll be at all the meetings and study group sessions we can attend. You know, I hope that they put some pictures and biographical information in some of the newsletters. Somehow or other, it would make it a bit more personal. I can't help but feel overwhelmed. We will try our best to keep in touch with the schools. Bob says, pity the parents who have more than four kids . . . and then adds—pity the poor teachers with so many—how can they talk with so many parents, never mind, really knowing so many kids!

Will write again soon.
Love,
Meg

What happens to children when they are catapulted into new organizational and learning programs?

How important to the wellbeing of a child is a continuing relationship between one school and the next?

Should new teachers be on their own to discover each child for themselves? Or should there be some direct line of communication bringing help from others who already know him?

How can we assure a continuation of special services for those youngsters for whom such continuity may be crucial?

How do we meet the articulation problems encountered within the school system itself?

Will educators and parents become so involved in explaining and talking to each other that they forget about talking with the child?

Wherever there is a planned program of school guidance services we can feel confident that these questions are being considered.

Planned Guidance Services

When we refer to guidance services within a school, we mean something beyond the daily giving and receiving of counsel, which is, after all, only one facet of a guidance program.

Guidance services by their very composition are intended to facilitate communication within the school system. They are the ways in which parents, children, teachers, schools and communities may reach each other. Planned programs for introducing children to new schools should include carefully organized opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to discuss either separately or together mutual concerns, personal and social relationships, school problems and community problems that involve children. An information center, which may be in the guidance office or library, makes available to the entire school the answers to many questions and is a source for finding out where to seek more detailed information.

Although a particular school may not have a director of guidance or a counselor, hopefully there is a planned program of guidance services to enable every child to find that personal touch. Teachers, too, should have the reassurance that although in this rapidly changing world the "little red schoolhouse" may be a thing of the past, the closeness and personal concern which the "little red schoolhouse" represented are qualities still to be valued and still present in the schools of today.

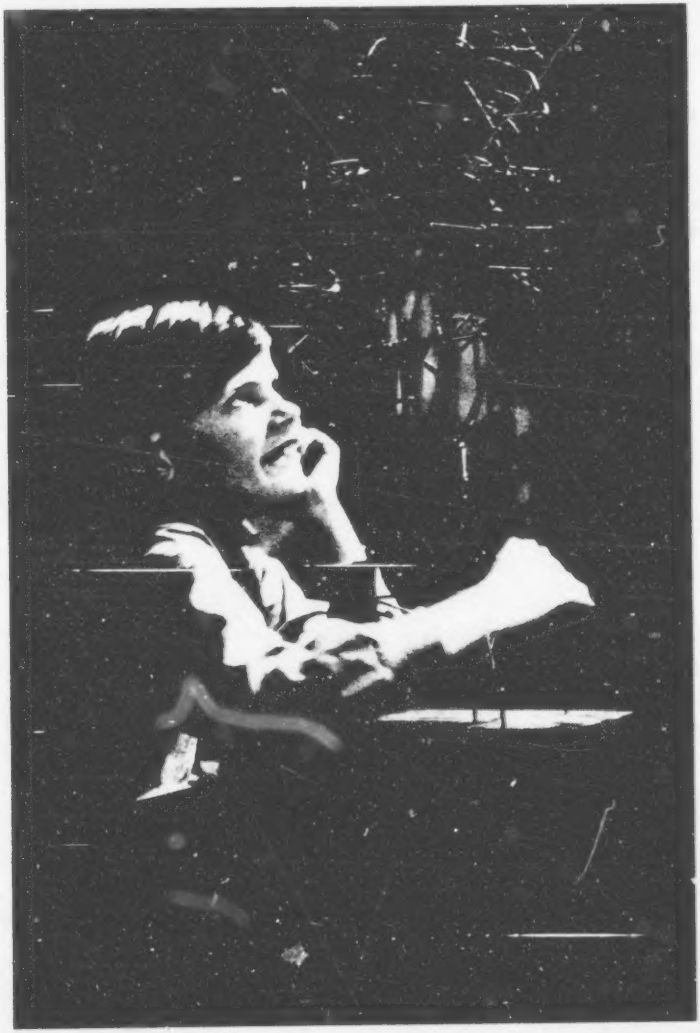
A good guidance program serves all the children in a school in that it promotes special pupil services and influences curriculum develop-

Communication in Guidance
HARRIETTE MERHILL

ment to meet the needs of the children enrolled. In a guidance program complete cumulative records are maintained containing relevant data, such as results of vision and hearing tests, and histories of childhood illness, notations of special interests and abilities, and academic and test evaluations. A planned guidance program differs from the average when it guarantees to students, parents and teachers that a qualified person will be available to discuss these records with them.

Adaptive to the age of the students, guidance programs extend out into the community seeking and opening lines of communication for career exploration, work opportunities and related experiences.

Guidance services provide "someone to talk with and someone to listen," someone who can if necessary act as an intermediary when other, usual communication lines break down, someone who helps individuals understand enough to help themselves.



The Whole School Wins or Loses

By TOM C. CHALKUS
Elementary Director, Duneland School Corporation
Chesterton, Indiana

Today's school staff is much like a basketball team. Each member has his own unique function on this team, and all must unite their best efforts toward common goals if success is to be achieved. Teamwork is a must. Let just one person fall down on the job and the game is lost! In the case of the school the program may be seriously handicapped.

In a school, the principal assumes the role of coach. He is the one who must inspire his "players" to contribute their best performance. He smooths out interpersonal conflicts, keeping things running smoothly for the group. He also guides his group along the general course they are to follow in their daily routine.

In order to lead effectively, the principal, as the coach, must know his "players" thoroughly. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of each and knows just how and when to play each one to best advantage. Not everyone can be an effective coach. Nor can just anyone be a successful principal. The ability to work with and understand persons of divergent personalities is essential.

The principal who can come down to earth is the one who will get the most out of his staff. The old role of watchdog is unbecoming in today's school, for many reasons. First, the basic assumption must be made that one's teachers are highly competent individuals well equipped to do a first-class job. All have been professionally trained, and represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They have been thoroughly screened not only during their college training and by critic teachers but also by the supervisor who hired him or her for the present job. If the supervisor was competent in his choice, surely here is a person who can be entrusted with responsibility without the need for "big brother's" constant watching.

Then, too, today's more militant teacher wishes—even demands—to be treated like an adult. "Casper Milquetoast" teachers are rapidly becoming obsolete, especially since more male teachers are entering the profession. The principal who recognizes these facts and treats his staff with the consideration he would like to have is off to a good start.

The principal should have a good memory for his own days as teacher. In dealing with new teachers, he may recall his own nervous first year, his mistakes in filling out attendance forms, dealing with discipline problems and other common struggles of the beginner. In dealing with older teachers, he should realize that on some days the

zest does wear off. Home problems should not, but sometimes do, carry over to the classroom even for the teacher. The principal who is human and understanding is the one who will get full cooperation from his staff.

In supervising, the modern principal tries to assist teachers in finding ways to improve their own instructional program. He is not there to criticize but to make positive suggestions and help teachers develop insight into their own strengths and weaknesses.

Building on Strengths

Learning to capitalize on the strengths of each teacher and encouraging teachers to share ideas freely with one another are big steps toward a successful school program, for every staff member has some particular interest or is strong in a certain field and the program should be arranged to make use of these talents. Exchange teaching can be tried or such methods as team teaching attempted. Visitations in other rooms ought to be encouraged. Above all, the staff should be apprised of its worth and informed that the principal is concerned with the quality of the programs teachers are carrying out.

A good principal knows that teachers flourish in an atmosphere of innovation and freedom—freedom to teach. The building program should be planned so that the teacher will have some free time during the day—time to prepare lesson plans, secure materials, or just time to reflect.

There ought to be as few meetings as possible and those short, for nothing is so tiring as a long-drawn-out meeting after an exhausting day. One can't be expected to be very creative late in the day. Some meetings can be held at other times, such as before classes or during free periods. Meetings can often be eliminated entirely by communicating through bulletins. Too often, meetings consist of little but the oral reading of information printed on these bulletins—an insult to the intelligence, since teachers are obviously capable of reading these bulletins themselves. Clarification of items, yes, but line-by-line repetition, no!

Teachers will always respect the principal who provides time to teach. Wherever possible, clerical duties such as lengthy attendance reports, money collections, and others are duties to be handled by the office staff, or where budget permits, teacher aides should be secured.

Keeping in Touch with Teachers

Providing sufficient instructional materials is another facet of keeping one's faculty happy. Allowing teachers some voice in the selection of these materials is always wise because each usually knows which best fits his own needs. There is likely to be low morale in a classroom devoid of the necessary books and materials for a quality program.

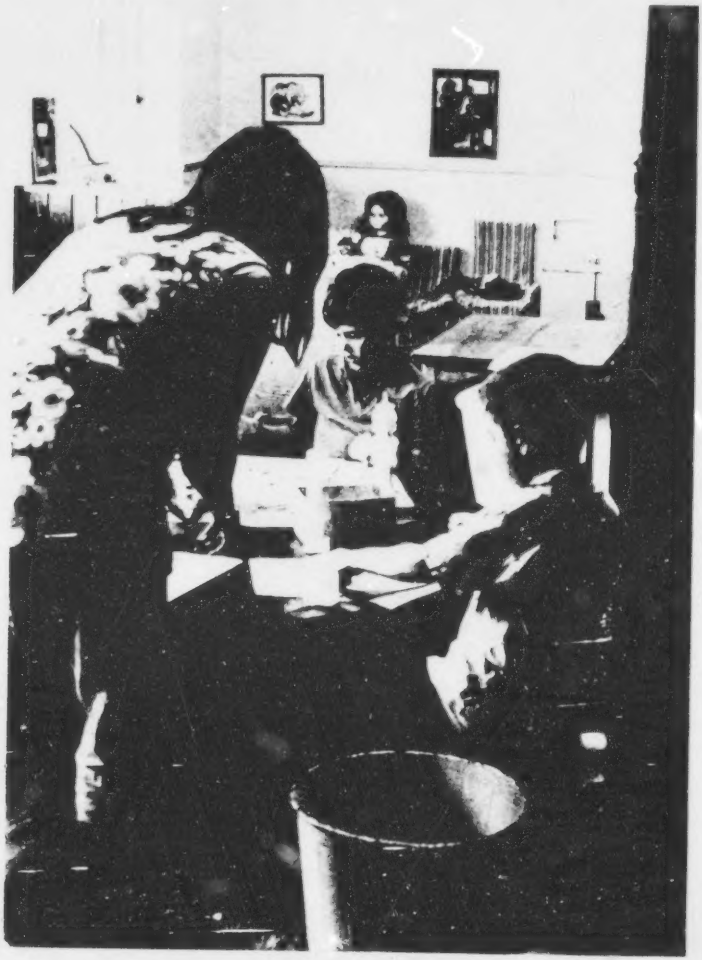
Supervisors are often criticized—sometimes deservedly so—for being out of touch with the realities of the classroom. Sometimes the principal's office becomes an island onto which a principal withdraws until a minor catastrophe develops and requires him to come out of his "security." It is the principal's duty to keep in daily touch with pupils and teachers. Just dropping in for a few minutes every few weeks or months won't do the job. Principals must find the time to occasionally take over a class for a particular subject, meet and work with groups of pupils working on projects, or even go on a field trip with the class. He must become *involved* with the goings-on of the school. He must be there when needed by students and faculty.

Above all, the principal needs to be a leader, one who can inspire others to do their best. School problems can generally be solved by

teachers themselves meeting in cooperative discussion, but the principal should set the tone of the discussion, get it started, then let the teacners arrive at some solutions. The principal's role in these matters is one of guidance—not of badgering others into supporting his own preconceived conclusions. When teachers and pupils are allowed some voice in their own destinies they are going to support more wholeheartedly the entire school program.

When changes are to be made in policy or procedure, a wise principal consults his faculty or gives them some forewarning. Even though the teachers may not have any say-so about the outcome, they appreciate being kept informed. Surprises are rarely appreciated.

Although the principal needs to operate in a more democratic role today, he cannot just sit back and let the school run its course. He has many great responsibilities and will be held accountable for the success or failure of the school program. He must remember, however, that he is also a member of the student-faculty team. How *he* performs will determine whether "the whole school wins or loses."



Okay-Plus

or, "What Ever Happened to the Report Card . . . ?"

By HERB TAYLOR
Administrative Assistant for Communications
Board of Education, Duluth

GEORGE MILHOUS, SR. is an affable, balding, mildly-middle-aged and reasonably-open-minded, comfortably-middle-class citizen of the United States.

GEORGE MILHOUS, JR., his son, is a student in the tenth grade at the Jerome S. Bruner Junior High School, an insututions thoroughly committed to progressive innovation in instructional methodology.

* * * * *

MILHOUS: Well, Son, how's that algebra coming along?

JUNIOR: O.K., I guess.

MILHOUS: No, I want a specific answer. What kind of a grade do you expect?

JUNIOR: Like I said, Dad. I think it'll be O.K.

MILHOUS: Not like you to be so evasive. What's the matter, having trouble?

JUNIOR: No—everything's fine. I expect algebra will be O.K., and civics—and I might get an O.K.-plus in English.

MILHOUS: You putting me on, Son? I mean, I *do* try to keep up with all the latest language fads, but let's skip all that just now. Just tell me in plain English what I can expect on that next report card.

JUNIOR: I thought you knew—they abolished report cards this year.

MILHOUS: They what!

JUNIOR: Sure. You just go in with Mom and talk to the teacher—the team-leader I mean. Miss Bronson. She's the leader of the teacher-team. She confers with my other teachers, then you talk to her about how I'm doing.

MILHOUS: Well, how *are* you doing?

JUNIOR: Like I said—O.K. I might get an O.K.-minus in band, though. To tell you the truth, I mean no lie—I never *was* very interested in the French horn. My guitar . . .

MILHOUS: Let's talk about the guitar later. I want to get straight on this plus-O.K. business.

JUNIOR: O.K.-plus. See, Dad, there are only three grades now: O.K.-plus, O.K., and O.K.-minus. It's a lot simpler than the old way.

MILHOUS: They don't give A's anymore? No C's or F's? How am I supposed to tell how you're doing compared to the other students?

JUNIOR: That's not important. Your primary concern as a parent is how well I'm achieving in terms of my own abilities, needs and interests. How well I'm competing with *myself*—in terms of my own potential.

Okay-Plus, or, Whatever Happened to the Report Card?
HERB TAYLOR

MILHOUS: Competing with *yourself?* Do you think I got to be District Manager by competing with *myself?* Believe you me, I had to compete with a lot of other guys, and the going was plenty rough, I'll tell you. And my primary concern as a parent is how well you'll achieve when you're *out* of school.

JUNIOR: Now we're talking about motivation. As a motivating factor, competition has been highly over-rated—especially competition for abstract symbols like grades. But now we're getting into the affective domain . . .

MILHOUS: Never mind all that. Just tell me this: How in blazes is a kid expected to learn anything if he doesn't have to earn a grade?

JUNIOR: (Opens notebook, reads) "The properly motivated student, provided that he is given sufficient options in terms of instructional methodology, and a reasonable voice in the establishment of instructional goals, will proceed successfully toward valid learning—that is, he will if he is allowed to establish his own pacing, without the creation of an academic obstacle course in the form of arbitrary deadlines and inflexible schedules. Given the appropriate stimuli—and their introduction at an early stage of his instructional development—he'll develop self-directedness and the impulse toward self-actualization." (Closes notebook) In other words, Dad, he'll do O.K.

MILHOUS: According to *who* and compared to *what?* And what about MIT? Are they going to let you in because you did "O.K." in trig and solid geometry? And where'd you get all that stuff about the "*ef*fective domain"—and where is it, anyway?

JUNIOR: It's all in the mind, Dad—and it's *af*fective. The affective domain is your feelings and emotions, and the cognitive domain is the learning, the intellectual part. Everything in school is either cognitive or affective, right? And as for MIT, they'll come around, if they haven't already. Simplified grading systems are the thing—you pass or you fail. Or maybe you get an O.K.—plus. You see, Dad, your problem is strictly affective. You're *conditioned* to want achievement evaluated in competitive terms, because that's the way it was when you went to school. Now that you're old—older—it's hard for you to adjust. But things are changing. In school *these* days, we just compete with ourselves. And most of us are doing O.K.

MILHOUS: But what if somebody gets *O.K.-minus* all the time, nothing *but* O.K.-minus? Then what? Does he flunk?

JUNIOR: O.K.-minus in *everything!* Boy that would certainly be a poor comment on the instructional standards of his school, wouldn't it? Why, you'd have to assume that his teachers just didn't know what they were doing, wouldn't you?

MILHOUS: Just how do you figure that ?!?!

JUNIOR: Simple! I mean, anyone can pull an occasional minus, because we all don't have the same aptitudes and interests. But *everybody's* got some skills and at least a few inherent interests. Properly motivated, and given a choice of instructional approaches, each student will discover *some* ways of learning which he prefers and *some* subject-matter areas that appeal to him. Unless, of course, he happens to be emotionally disturbed or has subnormal intelligence—in which case he should be in a special program, not in a regular class, unless of course there's adequate supportive staff, in which case . . .

MILHOUS: Wait a *minute!* Slow down! I just remembered something. You're taking a special teacher-preparatory course, aren't you?

JUNIOR: That's right, Dad. And I'm doing O.K. in it, too. Maybe even O.K.-plus.

MILHOUS: Uh-huh. A junior high school education course. A ninth-

grader learning how to be a teacher. I guess I *am* getting old. Doesn't make any sense . . .

JUNIOR: It's just an experiment, Dad. And it makes sense—after all, the whole business of education is to teach the learner how to learn. And teaching something is one of the best ways of learning. And besides, why *shouldn't* students learn about the science of instruction? How else can they properly evaluate the school they attend, or make accurate criticisms of their teachers?

MILHOUS: You mean YOU are supposed to evaluate your teachers?

JUNIOR: Didn't *you*, when you were in school?

MILHOUS: Well, yes . . .

JUNIOR: For instance? I mean, give me some specific examples. How about *your* ninth grade algebra teacher?

MILHOUS: She was terrible—a real tyrant, and so *dull*. Boy, you're lucky you don't have *her*. Will you believe it—an hour-and-a-*half* of homework every night? You'd read the book and understand it pretty well, but her lectures got you thoroughly confused. Of course, she was about 97 years old, and had been doing things the same way for . . .

JUNIOR: Could you be a little more *concise*, Dad? I'm getting the message, but you're using far too many words for effective communication.

MILHOUS: Well, what do you mean? She was a lousy teacher. What else should I say?

JUNIOR: Now you're not giving *enough* information. You need a system. (Re-opens his notebook) Take a look at this. Just finished it—my mid-term evaluation. I've evaluated all five of my teachers, based on a careful analysis of their performance in class. See, here are my criteria. For each of these factors I assign a percentile ranking of attainment: classroom manner, clarity of presentation, climate of student participation in instructional decision-making, clarity in stating instructional objectives, thoroughness in assessing individual student needs and abilities, provision for wide options in student-selection of educational materials . . .

MILHOUS: I see, I see. Yes. What do you do, send the teachers' report cards to the Superintendent?

JUNIOR: No just to the Principal. He forwards them to the Board of Education. It has to be that way, you see, because the teachers grade the Principal, and the Principals grade the Superintendent. The Superintendent doesn't grade anybody. He's too busy with salary negotiations and student riots.

MILHOUS: O.K. I mean all right. If that's the way things are going, I guess I'll just have to accept it. But what's that other piece of paper?

JUNIOR: That's the teacher report-card itself. It's just finished. See: the names of all my teachers and the subjects they teach: Algebra, civics, English, band and BTE—Basic Theory of Education.

MILHOUS: And what kind of grades are you giving out this semester —if it's not too unethical for you to tell me?

JUNIOR: Actually, I've been fairly generous. Let's see, for algebra, I'm giving Miss Webster an A, and Mr. Carter gets a C— for civics, and the team-leader, Miss Bronson, she gets a B+, and . . . . . .

— the end —

The Key to Successful School-Community Communication

By LAVAL S. WILSON
Principal, Central School
Evanston, Illinois, and
Director, Integration Institute Programs

The key to successful communication between the school and the home is *involvement*. Throughout the nation, there is presently a grave concern by parents, in many instances rightfully so, that they have no meaningful voice in the policies that shape the educational programs of their children's schools. At the same time, many administrators and teachers are not about to let non-certificated, nonprofessional and non-education-establishment parents control the programs of the schools.

As a school principal, I can very well empathize with the feelings of many school people when confronted by parents and community groups concerning the school control issue. The professional educator feels that he was hired because of his expertise in this area of specialization. He feels that his many years of experience and his skills qualify him to determine the nature and direction of the education of children. "If such is not the case," he will argue, "then replace me with someone who can do a better job. But don't tell me how to do 'my thing'!"

Personally, I don't feel that most parents are interested in taking over the control of the schools. But parents do have a tremendous desire to be vitally involved in the issues and activities of the schools which affect their children—in other words, almost all issues and activities. This was clearly stated recently by the President of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers.

> Again I would stress the belief that as PTA members we are parent-teacher citizens, obligated to deal with the tumultuous issues of our times—and to deal with them not obstructively but constructively. There is nothing in our Bylaws or policies that discourages us from wrestling with any problem that affects the lives of children and youth—much less anything that forbids us to do so.
>
> . . . This does not mean that the PTA must take a stand on every single conflict of opinion over what is best for children. It does mean that the PTA encourages free and open discussion.[1]

[1] Elizabeth Hendryson, "The President's Message," *The PTA Magazine*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (February 1969), p. 3.

The Key to Successful School-Community Communication

LAVAL S. WILSON

Present Involvement Concerns of Whites

Obviously, parents and educators are out to accomplish the same goals. Those goals are the development of each youngster to his fullest degree in socio-societal skill and academic skill. It is when we look closely at the nature of these two concepts that sources of conflict may become more obvious. Thelen has indicated that there is indeed a relationship between the academic and socio-societal mission of the school, but that the latter is far more important to parents. Parents—especially those who are white and middle-class—want the school properly to prepare their sons and daughters for their place in society. As long as the school is properly preparing these students for their place in society the parents are accepting of the school. That is to say, as long as the school, through its grouping practices and programs, teaches youngsters to expect to "attend a good college, become professionals, live in the suburbs, develop the right taste in women, wine and religion,"[2] the schools and their policies are in synchronization with the philosophy of the home.

The point that I would like to make is that white middle-class parents and community groups are basically interested in becoming involved in school affairs to insure for their youngsters appropriate socialization into urban society. Teachers, administrators, parents and the children must realize this. To do less will indicate extreme ignorance of what goes on in our schools every day. Stating that the priority of the white, middle-class school is student socialization is in no way placing a negative value on our present public educational institutions. What I am saying, though, is that the degree of understanding and mutual respect between the home and the school will improve significantly when all concerned accept this priority as fact. Much of the discord between the home and the school will disappear when the expectations and aspirations of the parents for children are similar to those held by the school. Closer cooperation and better communication can be valuable variables in improving those relationships.

The Rationale for Black Involvement

When an institution, such as the school, does not over a period of time meet the felt needs of the people it serves, the nature of its structure becomes subject to attack. This is precisely what is occurring in many Black communities. Charles Hamilton, in his article, "Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy," pointed out that it is no longer possible to discuss the failure of the school in meeting the educational needs of Black people without questioning the legitimacy of that institution. Concerning the belief of Black people:

> Do they believe that the school systems are operating in their behalf? Do they believe that the schools are legitimate in terms of educating their children and inculcating in them a proper sense of values? With the end product (i.e., their children graduating from high school as functional illiterates) clearly before their eyes at home and with volumes of reports documenting lack of payoff, it is not difficult to conclude that black people have good reason to question the legitimacy of the educational systems.[3]

Hamilton is suggesting that Black people are beginning to question the entire educational process. This is because we are aware that not

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[2] Herbert Thelen, "What's New in Grouping," *The PTA Magazine*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (September 1967), p. 24.

[3] Charles Hamilton, "Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Fall 1968), p. 672.

only are the schools not educating Black youngsters, but that the school is a major institution for socializing them into the predominantly white value structure of our society.

In contrast to the rationale for school involvement I described for many whites, Black parents are becoming more involved to question whether the system works for them at all. White parents, and again I will modify that to basically middle-class oriented whites, seek to become involved in school activities to insure the socialization of the child into society according to the norms of the parents. Involvement for these parents has worked and does work.

Black parents, however, are demanding involvement in schools to change the entire educational system. Maybe, though, it would be more accurate to state that Black parents are attempting to remodel the system so that the end benefits for Black youngsters will be more in accord with the socialization norms of the parents. The decentralization concept is a prime example of this phenomenon.[4] Basically, decentralization is concerned with providing an opportunity for the indigenous population of a community to control its own schools rather than imposing control from a generally nonrepresentative, centralized board of education and administration. Through decentralization, Black people feel that they can hold the school much more accountable for providing a curriculum more relevant to the needs of Black youngsters. Understandably, at this time in our society, Black parents are voicing critical concerns about the school's methodology, curriculum, personnel and policy-making role. The self-image of the Black child and the attitude of educators toward his culture *vis-à-vis the basically all white curriculum and the perpetuation of middle-class white values in the school is germane to the entire field of communication.*

Communication Advances and Racial Expectations

Previously, school populations differed in ethnicity on the basis of the indigenous mix in any community. Although the neighborhood school is still the most prevalent, the advent of permissive transfer, gerrymandering, and various other boundary changes used in racial proportionment have made the need for common understandings about the role of the school even more important. Communication between the home and the school frequently, at its best, is at the tolerable level when communities are composed of similar types of people. Add the volatile racial and socioeconomic variables and the opportunities for differing opinions, beliefs and expectations increase significantly.

Although I have contrasted the nature of parent involvement in the white middle-class school and that now occurring in many Black inner city schools (or in any school setting where there are Black youngsters), certain ideas related to involvement would be applicable in an all-white, all-Black or an integrated situation. There are several programs which seem applicable.

An Atmosphere Conducive to Mutual Understanding

First, school people can and should take the lead in providing an atmosphere conducive to better mutual understanding between the school and home. This is important for several reasons. By indicating a sincere willingness and desire to involve parents in school activities, one automatically implies that the education of children is a mutual undertaking to be shared by parents, teachers and administrators.

[4] Edmund Gordon, "Decentralization and Educational Reform," *IRCD Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 5 and Vol. V, No. 1 (Nov. 1968 - Jan. 1969), pp. 1-5.

Second, such an atmosphere destroys the myth that the school is a stronghold of alienation for parents. For the mother who is timid or feels that her every facial expression and vocal sound will be under intense examination by the teacher, the school indeed represents a hostile world. Once parents are made to feel that what they say and think is important to educators, better rapport is in the making.

Third, school people must convince parents to really feel that the school is theirs. It's the place where the youngsters spend more wakeful hours than at any other place, including the home. Therefore, the activities of the school are close to the hearts of parents, and we educators must welcome and solicit their involvement.

Let me caution those who would try to establish a conducive atmosphere for the purpose of controlling parents that it will not work. A sincere and warm feeling between the school and parents cannot be faked, nor does it provide a medium for control. This type of feeling develops only after much interaction between school people and parents has been mutually satisfactory.

Imaginative School-Community Programs

Once parents really feel that their participation in school activities is wanted, needed and is valuable, there is still the question of implementation.

As an elementary school principal, it has been my experience that imaginative school-community programs are excellent for getting parents involved in the school. Such programs create an interest in new parents of a school community to become actively involved, and at the same time more experienced parents are stimulated to continue their participation.

Parent Tutors

In all communities there are parents who can tutor children individually or in small groups. These volunteers can assist youngsters in mathematics, reading, social studies, or other areas that parents and teachers feel would be beneficial. At Central School in Evanston, we have used many mothers forty minutes a day for several days a week to write the dictated stories of some of our youngest boys and girls, while the classroom teacher, student teacher, or reading specialist works with other small groups. Such help is invaluable to teachers and the students and requires very little orientation.

Of course, some communities have more mothers with time for volunteer assistance. But even in very economically deprived neighborhoods, there are many parents who are willing and available to help if there is a sincere effort to get them.

Lunchroom Supervisors

Evanston's sixteen elementary schools are utilizing the services of parents to supervise the snack-lunch programs. Most of these parents receive remuneration for supervising the lunch activities of youngsters of working parents, of youngsters who would have to travel a great distance home for lunch, or pupils who eat lunch at school because of other special reasons. Some parents, though, volunteer time each week because they know that there is a definite need for their services.

Language Interpreters

In multiethnic communities and in areas where much of the indigenous population is non-English speaking, bilingual parents can be quite helpful. In our school we have utilized many of our parents as interpreters during student registration, as a liaison between the school

and home, and between the home and community groups. The school, then, becomes a catalyst for helping parents to help each other.

School-Community Newsletter

Numerous in-school and out-of-school activities are of interest to students, parents and other members of the community. Frequently, though, a PTA flyer or letter describing an event is the only method many schools use to disseminate information. A bimonthly school-community newsletter carried home by the boys and girls could be very informative. Each home would not only be receiving the same information, alleviating the many inaccuracies of word-of-mouth communication, but could use the newsletter as a calendar for upcoming events.

In addition, the publication of such a newsletter by parents would probably increase the interest in sharing ideas and programs with others in the neighborhood as well as creating a sense of school-community pride for "our publication."

Parents as Other School Helpers

Indeed, the types of activities that will foster parent involvement are many. Here are a few more:

utilizing parents

- to contact the home when students are absent
- as aides to school nurses
- as room mothers to set up parent conferences for the classroom teacher
- to explain the unique nature of the school to visitors
- as aides in library-media centers

Parent, Child, School Activities

A sure-fire way of getting parents into the school and thus increasing the opportunity for closer contact between the parents and the school people is to initiate activities in which parents, students and teachers may participate together, not the formal, stilted type which result in parents chatting among themselves and educators doing the same. Rather, I am suggesting viable and stimulating programs that would make the youngsters and their parents proud of the school and eager to participate in other types of joint projects.

A potluck dinner is an activity that requires sharing between parents and school-community cooperation. Various dishes are cooked at home and brought to school for an evening of sharing and merriment. Tables may be so arranged that a good mixture of ten to fifteen parents, boys and girls, teachers and other community visitors may talk, eat and enjoy themselves. Movies, hall games, story reading and other small group games can be provided for the youngsters after the meal.

Other activities that might also foster total family-school involvement are evening Halloween programs, playground cook-outs and family art nights. The main point is to select programs that will provide an opportunity for a lot of fun and personal involvement for all who participate.

Racial and Social Issue Discussions

It would be difficult for the members of any school community or home not to have discussed at some point the ramifications of the racist nature of our society. Since one's own perception will most likely, I would venture to say, be significantly influenced by his own skin color, misinterpretations or just a plain breakdown in communica

tion frequently take place during discussions of racial issues. The school can provide an important service by assisting parents, teachers and students to better understand their own feelings about racial prejudice and the fact that many of our own discriminatory acts and those of others can be directly related to these personal feelings. Prejudicial feelings and overt discrimination are crucial factors which play havoc with communication. Whether we are considering the influence of racial discord in a school community that is all-Black, all-white, or integrated, there is a definite need to share opinions and develop a common understanding of the nature of the issues. This does not mean that parents, teachers and students should agree on all aspects of the problem or the methods for solving it, but it does mean that a school and its community should come to grips with the racial issue.

Many of District 65's (Evanston) schools and PTA's are jointly providing evening forums on the race question. These programs involve parents, teachers and other interested adults in the community. Films, panels, major speakers, role-playing and small group discussions are some of the methods being used in these projects. The main objective is to provide Black and white parents and school people the chance to interact and exchange ideas about racism and its effect on our society, including the teaching-learning process in our schools.

In addition, all of our schools are involved with the students in projects concerning racial prejudice, Black history, Black power, one's self-concept, interpersonal relationships and other crucial issues about school integration. By providing an opportunity for students to become participants in activities related to race relations, we are involving all of the segments of the educational triangle—the home, the child and the school.

Conclusion

In successful school-community communication a meaningful exchange of ideas can take place only when the prime components are actively included. The vital components in a school system are the child, the parent and the school. Involvement in the context of this article means participation and interaction.

Differences of opinion and even conflict between and among groups of people is a reality of life. A clearer understanding of the ideas of others and their understanding of ours, though, cannot take place in a vacuum. Any success in communication between the home and the school would seem to rest squarely on a mutual understanding of the same issues by the student, the parents, and the school. Again, we are talking about understanding and communication, not agreement, and this type of communication equals *involvement*.

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